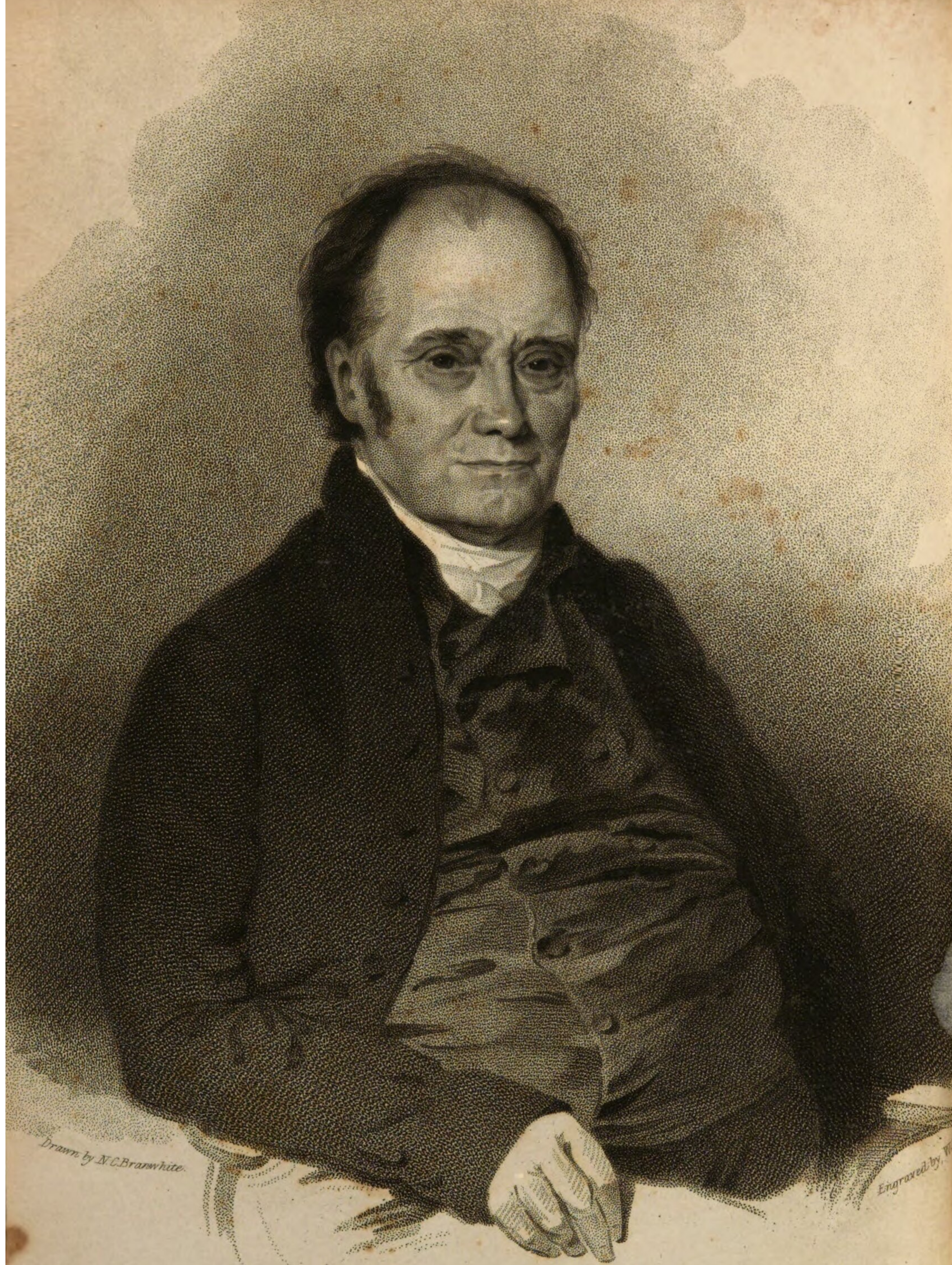


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JOHN RYLAND, D.D.

PASTORAL MEMORIALS:

SELECTED FROM THE MANUSCRIPTS

OF THE LATE

REV^D. JOHN RYLAND, D. D.

OF BRISTOL:

WITH

A MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR.

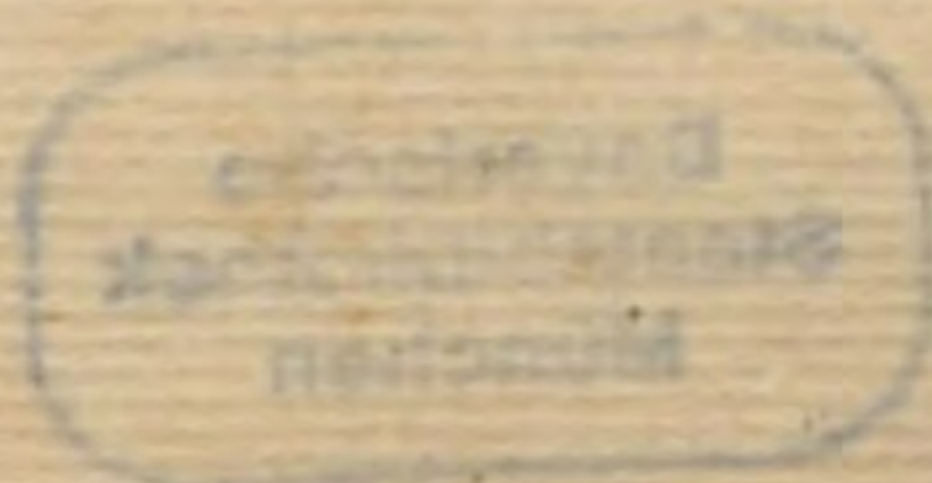
IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

B. J. HOLDSWORTH.

MDCCCXXVI.



PASTORAL MEMORIALS

PRESENTED TO THE MEMBERS OF THE

OF THE

REV. JOHN RYLAND, D.D.

BY

THE

OF THE

LONDON

R. J. HODDER & CO.

1854

FULLER, PRINTER, BRISTOL.

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THE Subscribers to the "Pastoral Memorials" are respectfully informed, that it has been found impracticable to collect and arrange the materials for the Memoir of Dr. Ryland, in time to allow of its being prefixed to the First Volume. It will appear with the Second Volume, which is now in the press, and will be published, it is expected, by the end of the year.

Several friends of Dr. Ryland having expressed a wish for a republication of the most important of his Sermons and Tracts, (most of which have been for some time out of print,) and of many papers on interesting theological subjects, in periodical works, the Family are disposed to comply with the suggestion, should a sufficient number of Subscribers be obtained to defray the expense. It is calculated, that the Collection would form a volume of about the same size and price as the present. Any persons who may be disposed to encourage the publication, are requested to forward their names to the Booksellers who receive Subscriptions for the present work.

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I am indebted to the Pastoral Association
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for the Minutes of the Association in time to allow
its being inserted in the First Volume, and will
appear with the Second Volume, which is now in the
press, and will be published in a few days by the
end of the year.

It is very much to be regretted that the
Minutes of the Association of the most important
of the Association, and those of which have
been the cause of great loss of time
papers on important theological subjects, in the
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with the suggestion, should a sufficient number of
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TO
THE REV^D. WILLIAM CAREY, D. D.
SENIOR MISSIONARY AT SERAMPORE,
AND PROFESSOR OF THE
SANSKRIT, BENGALÉE, AND MAHRATTA LANGUAGES,
IN THE COLLEGE OF FORT WILLIAM,
IN REMEMBRANCE OF
THE LONG AND UNINTERRUPTED FRIENDSHIP
THAT SUBSISTED BETWEEN HIMSELF AND DR. RYLAND,
AND ESPECIALLY
OF THEIR INTIMATE CO-OPERATION
IN THE CAUSE OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS,
THESE VOLUMES ARE,
WITH SENTIMENTS OF THE GREATEST RESPECT
AND AFFECTION,
INSCRIBED, BY
THE AUTHOR'S FAMILY.

BRISTOL,
JUNE 21st, 1826.

TO

THE REV. WILLIAM CAIRY, D. D.

SENIOR MISSIONARY AT BANGALORE

AND PROFESSOR OF THE

MANUSCRIPT, HINDUSTANI AND PERSIAN LANGUAGES

IN THE COLLEGE OF FORT WILLIAM

IN RECOGNITION OF

THE LONG AND UNINTERRUPTED FRIENDSHIP

THAT SUBSISTED BETWEEN HIMSELF AND OUR FATHER

AND ESPECIALLY

OF THEIR JOINTLY CO-OPERATION

IN THE CAUSE OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

THESE VOLUMES ARE

WITH SENTIMENTS OF THE HIGHEST REGARDS

AND AFFECTION

PRESENTED BY

THE AUTHOR'S FAMILY

Bangalore
1851

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MEMOIR,

&c.

DR. RYLAND's ancestors, for a series of years, resided in Gloucestershire and the neighbouring parts of Warwickshire. His father, the Rev. John Collett Ryland, son of Mr. Joseph Ryland, who lived at Stow-in-the-wold, was born in 1723. In his 18th year, he became a member of the Baptist church at Bourton-on-the-water, then under the care of the Rev. Benjamin Beddome; and soon after removed to Bristol, to pursue his preparatory studies for the Christian ministry, under the direction of Mr. Bernard Foskett. His numerous common-place books and diaries, which yet remain, though containing little that would be suitable for general inspection, amply attest his unquenchable thirst for

knowledge and the depth and fervor of his piety. In the commencement of his studies, he had to sustain a severe mental conflict on the fundamental points of religious belief—the divine existence and the immortality of the soul. Only those who have passed through a similar discipline can adequately conceive the unutterable satisfaction resulting from the successful issue of such inquiries. Owing probably to the impulse thus received at the outset of his theological inquiries, the evidences of religion were always a subject of unusual interest to Mr. Ryland, and called forth the utmost exercise of his abilities. On leaving Bristol, he settled at Warwick, where he was ordained pastor of the Baptist church, in 1750; but after nine years removed to Northampton. During his residence in the latter place, for six and twenty years, his ministry was very successful, and the increase of the congregation required two enlargements of the meeting-house. In the year 1786, he resigned to his son the whole care of the church, and retired to Enfield, near London, where he died July 24, 1792, in the 69th year of his age. Soon after his ordination at Warwick, he married Elizabeth, the only daughter of Mr. Samuel Frith, of that town. They had five children, one of whom died young. The rest were all spared to reach

the decline of life, though only one now survives—the Hon. Herman Witsius Ryland, who went to Canada many years since, as Secretary to the Governor, Lord Dartmouth, and is now a member of the Upper House of Legislature in that province.*

A few particulars, which may be deemed not uninteresting, relative to Dr. Ryland's early life, will be given in his own words, as contained in an unfinished narrative, drawn up at the request of an intimate friend in 1807.

“ I was born at Warwick on January 29, 1753, in the parsonage-house belonging to the great church, which my father rented of the Rector, who was a candid, moderate man. When some of the high church people reflected on Dr. Tate for letting the house to an Anabaptist teacher, he replied, ‘ What would you have me do ? I have brought the man as near the church as I can ; but I cannot force him into it.’ ”

“ When I was four or five years old, my father invited one Hill of Buckingham, (noticed by Spence, the author of *Polymetis*, as having attained very considerable knowledge of Hebrew by his own

* Of Mrs. Elizabeth Dent, (Dr. R.'s sister,) a short account appeared in the Baptist Magazine for May, 1821. Mr. James Ryland, the other brother, died some time before.

industry,) to come to his house for a few weeks : during his stay, some of the boys began learning Hebrew. I also was very desirous to begin. My father gave me Stennett's Grammar, containing a little Vocabulary, and the twenty-third Psalm. I remember reading that psalm to Mr. Hervey, when my father visited him in the summer of 1758. Mr. Hervey died the following Christmas.

“ My mother taught me a great deal of Scripture History, by explaining to me the pictures on the Dutch tiles in the parlour chimney at Warwick. But when I was very young, I was always unwilling to repeat one or two of the answers concerning the misery of the wicked, in Dr. Watts's first set of Catechisms, and used to burst into tears, if ever it came to my turn to say them.

“ About Michaelmas, 1759, my father removed to Northampton. I was fond of reading, and generally preferred that employment to play. I not only delighted in history and poetry, but in many religious books, especially in Bunyan's Holy War, and De Foe's Family Instructor. Some parts of the latter work I could never read without tears

“ I was accustomed to say a prayer morning and evening, often adding a few expressions of my own to the form drawn up by Dr. Watts. I was per-

suaded that all would be lost who died without conversion, and my conscience was sometimes alarmed with a sense of my own danger. I used to purpose an alteration sometime, and thought that I would begin at a particular period, when it might be noticed by others, how much I was altered from that particular season. But, though I often had slight convictions of sin, nothing of an abiding nature affected my mind till nearly the close of my thirteenth year."

After mentioning that two or three of his father's pupils used to walk together every evening, for the purpose of religious conversation, the narrative thus proceeds :—

"On the 22d of September, 1766, I was conversing with R——; but their usual time for meeting being come, he went away, at which I took offence. On the following morning he spoke to me, and I would not answer him; when he inquired what was the matter. I replied, 'You know that you fell out with me last night, and would not speak to me.' He answered, that he had not fallen out with me, but he wanted to talk with B—— and B——; adding, 'I hope we were talking of *something better*.' This expression '*something better*,' immediately struck my mind. I suspected that he

had a reference to religious subjects, and that they had that knowledge and sense of them which I had not, but which it was necessary I should have. I endeavoured, in the evening, to ascertain what was the subject of their conversation. I found that they were talking about Jesus Christ, and the salvation of their souls. ‘Oh!’ thought I, ‘these boys are going to heaven, and shall I be left behind!’ I felt that I was undone without an interest in Christ. Yes, I *felt* it now; though I knew in some manner before, that it was so, yet I had not habitually laid it to heart. Those who know how I was educated, may well suppose that I could not have been destitute of a speculative acquaintance with evangelical truth: but I now began to feel more deeply affected with it than I had ever been before, and endeavoured to apply for mercy by earnest prayer. I remember, about this time, a little gratification afforded me by my father, excited a fear of having a portion in this world, instead of future blessedness, which savoured indeed of childish simplicity; yet indicated, I trust, a tenderness of conscience and an anxiety for spiritual blessings.

“On one occasion I felt greatly dejected, and was relieved by referring to Hosea xiii. 14. ‘I will ransom them from the power of the grave, I will

redeem them from death.' It is impossible for me, at this distance of time, to recollect the exact train of thought which these words excited, or to ascertain that there was no erroneous conception mixed with my comfort. I believe that I had often heard religious people express themselves inaccurately respecting the application of the promises. It was not till some years afterwards, that I was led, by reading Edwards on the Affections, to consider this subject closely. But I remember that I was immediately convinced of the justness of his observations; and I hope that my own experience, even before I thus understood the subject, did in the main agree with the statements of that judicious divine. See his Treatise, Part III. p. 123, &c.

"I sometimes was greatly injured by a passionate temper, which brought me into much distress. I felt, however, an earnest longing after holiness, and could not be content with merely hoping I was pardoned, but wanted to be *like Christ*."

The concluding words of this extract may be considered as a brief summary of the great object of the writer's life. It is, indeed, no more than what every disciple of the New Testament must profess in theory; but in how few instances comparatively is it pursued with that unremitting ardor, and that

simplicity of purpose, evinced in the present instance!

On the 13th of September, 1767, he was baptized, with two of his father's pupils and Mr. Joseph Dent, afterwards his brother-in-law. That, at an early period of his religious profession, he should entertain thoughts of devoting himself to the Christian ministry, will not be thought surprising; and the circumstances in which he was placed were such as favoured a suitable and gradual introduction to it. For some time he had united with several of his serious companions, in meetings for prayer and religious discourse; it was an easy step to address them in a more formal manner from a text of scripture. After a frequent practice of these exercises, for upwards of two years, he commenced a more public trial of his abilities, and received the final approval of the church, March 10, 1771. "From that time, (he remarks, thirty-six years after, and the observation may be extended to a much longer period,) I have had very few silent sabbaths." Ample scope was afforded for his exertions in the neighbouring villages;* and when his usual occu-

* Soon after he commenced his public labours, he received a letter from his excellent friend, Mr. Newton, then Curate of Olney; from which the following extract may not be unacceptable:—

pations permitted, it was esteemed a gratifying relaxation to spend a day in visiting several aged

“ I have occasionally heard sad tales of you, that by the loudness, length, and frequency of your public discourses, you are lighting your candle at both ends. I cannot blame your zeal ; you serve a good master, who is well worthy that you should spend and be spent for his sake. You have likewise a sense of the worth and danger of souls, and this makes you earnest and importunate. Perhaps too, you think you are ‘ immortal till your work is done,’ (which I shall not dispute,) and therefore think it the less needful to be careful of yourself. However, as the Lord usually works by means, if it is his pleasure to prolong your life for the good of many, he will perhaps dispose you to listen to a word of advice on this head. I should account him more generous than prudent, who, to show his heartiness in entertaining his friends, should in the course of one year, exhaust an estate, which, if properly managed, might have supplied him and them for forty years to come. Your case is something similar. You are young, hardly attained yet to your constitutional strength, and perhaps, if you over exert yourself at this period of your life, you never may. I fear, unless you can restrain yourself, you are laying a foundation for an early old age, and distressing bodily complaints ; and that, for every sermon you preach, or have preached, before you are twenty-one, especially if you speak loud and long, you will hinder yourself preaching ten hereafter. I say, your desire is good, but you need a bridle, or you will soon unfit yourself for public usefulness. It is a noble aim to serve the Lord, but we are sometimes too hasty ; like children who love fruit, but have not patience to stay till it is ripe. But the Lord is seldom hasty in his operations ; and when our zeal comes to be sifted by experience and after reflection, we shall perhaps find some of the bran of our own spirit mixed with it ; nay, possibly, that Satan, transformed into an angel of light, has put us upon things beyond the present call of duty, and beyond our strength, that we may give him less disturbance in future. In a word, as I approve of your zeal, I shall be glad, for your own sake, if you will approve and adopt a little of my prudence. I wish my letters may be a bridle to you, and yours a spur to me.”

Christians in these places, who, on their part, highly valued the short religious exercises engaged in on these occasions, and with much simplicity and affection used to say, that they were not worthy he should come under their roof. Besides ministerial duties, Dr. Ryland assisted in his father's school, till his 25th year, and in 1781 was united with him in the pastoral office, which in five years devolved on himself entirely. In this connexion, his success, without being extraordinary, was such as often excited his gratitude to the source of all good, and contributed to sustain his mind under the pressure of various trials, partly domestic, and partly springing up in the church itself. Of the latter, one which gave him great concern was the symptoms of an Antinomian spirit, evinced by some individuals who attempted, but in vain, to introduce the noted Mr. Huntington into the pulpit.* But, however much to be regretted the

* Dr. Ryland gives the following character of Huntington, in one of his last publications. "At length, the sentiment (that the moral law is not a rule of conduct for believers) began to be broached with unblushing confidence, by a man who arose from a very low situation of life, and drew many disciples after him. His positivity, his volubility, with abundance of low wit, and abuse of other ministers, acquired for him a considerable degree of popularity, though chiefly among the ignorant and illiterate; while he had a knack of so connecting detached sentences of scripture, without regard to their

effect of such events might be, in lessening his social enjoyments, and in repressing his natural energy,

original import, as to make them appear to prove whatever he pleased. His profligacy, before his supposed conversion, would have been no evidence that it was not genuine; but his effrontery in relating it afterwards, in the most ludicrous and jocose expressions, must go far towards invalidating it; especially since after he had left off the indulgence of *the lusts of the flesh*, no man seemed more completely under the dominion of the *lusts of the mind*. Pride, arrogancy, and malignity, indulged for many years, without the least semblance of jealousy, lest he should carry them too far, in any case whatever, are as inconsistent with all the ideas I can form of a '*saved sinner*,' as lewdness or drunkenness. This man I never heard or saw; though I have read many of his writings, and have been shocked to see such a mixture of vaunting confidence as to his own safety, and rancorous bitterness towards every man who did not treat him as a prophet of the Lord. When I refused to surrender my pulpit, at the desire of two or three discontented persons, to this Ishmaelite, he printed a pamphlet, in which he charged me with shutting his master out of the pulpit, by shutting out him; and says, 'Two clerical gentlemen at Bristol treated me, without any just cause, just as Mr. Ryland has done; but it did not pass unresented: both of them are now no more.' There is no doubt that he refers to Mr. Hoskins and Dr. Caleb Evans, in this passage. And in another place, alluding again to my honoured predecessor, he says, 'I would have Mr. Ryland take care how he calls the gospel a *pernicious notion*, lest, like the great Doctor at Bristol, God take away his speech, and then his breath.' (We had alleged, as a sufficient reason for not giving up the pulpit to a stranger, that he had, just before the application was made, been writing against my father, the former pastor of the church 'in defence of the pernicious notion, that the law is not the rule of the believer's conduct.' So that he makes the denial of the law as a rule of conduct, to be the very essence of his gospel. What Paul would think of this religion is evident. Rom. viii. 7. iii. 31.)

"Had it pleased God to remove me from this world, at any period between the year 1791, and the death of this man, no doubt he

they might be considered, in a more elevated and spiritual view, as of inestimable value ; since they

would have added my name to the list of those, who were struck dead for not receiving him. But verily, his anathemas excited no fear in my mind, nor could I be gulled by his arrogant claims of superior evangelical light. It is not my province to judge individuals any further than I am authorised by our Lord's rule, ' By their fruits ye shall know them ;' but no pretensions to faith can afford me the least satisfaction as to the safety of that man's state, in whom I can discern no semblance of penitence, humility, or godly jealousy, and whose preaching has no tendency to produce either of these essential graces in those that admire it.

" Some person published a pamphlet, soon after the death of this extraordinary man, entitled '*The Voice of Years.*' The writer, who stiled himself *a Disciple of Jesus*, might truly deserve that appellation ; but his publication, I own, did not afford me much satisfaction ; no more so, than an attempt to show, that a fountain may send forth, at the same place, sweet water and bitter. My dear brother Fuller reviewed this pamphlet in the Baptist Magazine, for June, 1815, which was nearly the last thing he wrote for the press, and of which I most cordially approve.

" This man is now gone, but his writings remain an awful monument of the pride, censoriousness, and malignity, which may be sometimes connected with a distorted and mutilated gospel. Many others, inferior to him in their talents, imbibed similar sentiments, and as far as they were able propagated them in a similar manner. Dogmatical assertions, daring appeals to heaven, virulent abuse, and low wit, are the weapons of their warfare.

" One man, who did considerable mischief in the connexion in which he was for some years employed, after denying that the believer was *in any sense* under the law, was asked, ' Well, Mr. Bradford, would it be a sin for you to stab me to the heart ?' He replied, ' It would be a breach of the law of the land, and I should be justly condemned to die.' ' But would it be a sin in the sight of God ?' ' I do not choose to answer that question,' was the rejoinder !"—Vide " Serious Remarks on the Dif-

evidently contributed, under the divine blessing, to mature the best virtues of the Christian character: they deepened his humility; purified and chastened his zeal; induced more diligent self-inspection, more genuine benevolence to men, more profound and entire devotedness to the will and service of God. To give a detailed account of these occurrences is not requisite. It will be more to the purpose of this sketch, to advert to Dr. Ryland's Theological sentiments: these, it is well known, were decidedly Calvinistic. At an early period of his public life, however, he was led to alter his views on one point of great practical moment; which, though it formed no genuine part of Calvinism, was maintained by some of the leading ministers in the Baptist denomination, and in many of the churches was considered

ferent Representations of Evangelical Doctrine, &c. Part II. pp. 38—42.

In a Letter to Mr. Fuller, written March, 1814, he also says, "Have you seen the Voice of Years, respecting Huntington? — expected I should be much pleased with it. I cannot say I was. I felt dissatisfied that it never traced the glaring inconsistency of the man to any evident source. There must be some *πρωτον ψευδος*, some first false principle; or the same fountain could not send forth salt water and fresh. This is scarcely touched upon by the *Old Disciple*. I do not want positively to judge of any individual. But Romans viii. 7, leads me to suspect that man to be altogether carnal, whose mind is enmity against the law; and though Huntington might insist on its *strictness*, he never, to my knowledge, maintained its *goodness* and *justice*."

almost a test of orthodoxy.* It was an opinion sanctioned by Dr. Gill and Mr. Brine, that it was unlawful to urge the duties of faith and repentance on men in general—an error, which, to unprejudiced minds, would be sufficiently exposed, by observing, that “it would have annihilated at once the apostolic commission, by rendering it impossible to preach the gospel to any creature, since there were in the Gentile world, none to whom it could on this principle be addressed.” A sentiment so adverse to the natural promptings of Christian benevolence, excited in the minds of Dr. Ryland and several of his brethren, the most painful embarrassment.† They

* An account of the state of the Baptist churches, with a particular reference to this subject, may be found in Ryland’s Life of Fuller, Chap. I. See also, Hall’s Reply to Kinghorne, p. 173. and Hall’s Help to Zion’s Travellers—Prefaces by Dr. Ryland and Mr. Hall.

† “The second year after I had been deeply impressed by divine truth, my father allowed me to have my time pretty much to myself; and, instead of closer attention to literary pursuits, I spent those twelve months chiefly in reading divinity. At so early a period, it is not wonderful that I should altogether fall in with the sentiments of some excellent divines, whose writings my father held in the highest esteem, and whom I found to be strenuous advocates for the doctrines of grace, to which I felt an ardent attachment. Nevertheless, an extensive acquaintance with their predecessors, both the old Nonconformists, and the most evangelical Episcopalian writers, made me sensible, that former divines considered the exhortations to which Mr. Brine objected, as perfectly consistent with Calvinistic

endeavoured to address the unconverted as far as their system would allow, and not unfrequently were carried beyond it. They were gradually led to a devout and earnest examination, and finally to an abandonment of a tenet which shackled all their movements. Dr. Ryland's mind was, in some measure, prepared for a change, by an extensive acquaintance with the Puritan writers and their immediate successors, who were for nothing more distinguished than their fearless and cogent appeals to the conscience. But Edwards's Treatise on the Freedom of the Will, with which and the other works of that writer, he became acquainted about the year 1775, rendered him the greatest assistance. His intimacy with Mr. Fuller, (who had been involved in similar perplexities,) which commenced soon after, and was cemented into a friendship, seldom perhaps equalled and never surpassed, for genuineness and constancy, powerfully tended to give firmness to his convictions. Several other ministers, about the same

principles. But, for a few years, I imagined, that these later divines were more accurate than their predecessors; and accordingly, when I first entered on the work of the ministry, though I endeavoured to say as much to sinners as my views of this subject would allow, yet I was shackled by adherence to a supposed systematic consistency, and carefully avoided exhorting sinners to come to Christ for salvation."—Vide Serious Remarks, &c. Part II. pp. 7, 8.

time, were led to adopt similar views, among whom should be especially mentioned, Mr. (since Dr.) Carey, the venerable Mr. Hall of Arnsby, and Mr. Sutcliff of Olney. Though in many points their characters were strongly contrasted, yet it is pleasing to observe, that their devotedness to the same great cause, so attempered and blended the respective peculiarities of each, as to render them eminently subservient to the promotion of the kingdom of their common Lord and Saviour. The most important result of their constant interchange of sentiment, was the establishment of the Baptist Missionary Society, Oct. 2, 1792. The leading facts respecting the formation of this Society are so well known to the public, as to render any detailed account needless. What specific part the subject of this Memoir had in its establishment, cannot be stated, excepting that the Association Letter, written by him, on "Godly Zeal," may be considered as having contributed to keep up the impression made by Dr. Carey's "Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians, to attempt the Conversion of the Heathen;" and that, as no individual more fully possessed the confidence and affection of its two leading agents, Mr. Fuller at home, and Dr. Carey abroad, so no one was more deeply concerned in all the deliberations respecting

it, or felt a greater devotion to its interests. After the decease of the former, he might, indeed, be considered as its second father; and his anxiety for its welfare, ceased only with the last pulsations of his heart.* Scarcely had its first Missionaries left their native shores, when Providence removed him to the precise spot, where he could most effectually promote its interests, not only by introducing it to the notice of a large portion of the religious world, but by training the youthful race of ministers in those views of Christian doctrine and duty, by which his own zeal had been kindled and sustained.

By the death of Dr. Caleb Evans, in August, 1791, the two offices of Pastor of the Baptist Church in Broadmead, Bristol, and President of the Academical Institution connected with it, were

* An extract from Dr. Ryland's Diary, will serve to show the spirit of deep piety which actuated the founders of this Mission. How openly it has been rewarded, (Matt. vi. 6.) the success of the Society as to its specific objects, and the liberal patronage it has received from all denominations of Christians, will testify.

"Jan. 21, 1788.—Brethren Fuller, Sutcliff, Carey, and I, kept this day as a private fast, in my study: read the Epistles to Timothy and Titus; Booth's Charge to Hopkins; Blackerby's Life, in Gillies; and Rogers of Dedham's Sixty Memorials for a Godly Life: and each prayed twice—Carey with singular enlargement and pungency. Our chief design was to implore a revival of the power of godliness in our own souls, in our churches, and in the church at large."

vacated, and the state of the denomination at that time, rendered the choice of a successor equally important and difficult. After an unsuccessful application to the late excellent Dr. Fawcett of Hebdenbridge, the views of the bereaved church were directed to Northampton, and in April, 1792, Dr. Ryland, who had previously supplied their pulpit for some weeks, received an unanimous invitation to accept the pastoral office. That one, whose disposition was naturally retiring and unobtrusive, and who was so conscientiously alive to the claims of duty, would shrink from a station of superior distinction and responsibility, might be expected; and the ties of a connexion which had subsisted almost from childhood, and had been confirmed by a long intercourse of Christian and social kindness, presented an additional barrier against the most distant thought of a removal.* Not

* An extract from Dr. Ryland's answer to the first invitation, will best explain his views and feelings on this occasion.

“ DEAR BRETHREN,

“ — I shall confine myself to my own feelings on this critical occasion; and would begin by repeating my assurances of sincere concern for your welfare, and that of the other church connected with you, as well as of the Academy, over which your successive pastors have so honorably presided. I often feel humbled before God, under a sense of my unworthiness of the respect his people have shown me; and, were I at perfect liberty, it would be with

discouraged, however, by want of success in the first instance, the church renewed their solicitations, in which

much fear and trembling that I should venture, even after a longer trial, to comply with your invitation. I know my own defects better than you can be supposed to know them on so short an acquaintance, and am aware I am poorly qualified for the station to which you candidly deem me competent. Yet, in the peculiar circumstances of your distress, and knowing how scanty a number of middle-aged persons we have at this time in our denomination, that have all the qualifications, I, as well as you, should desire in one to fill that post, I durst not refuse a trial, whether I could stand in the gap for a time till a more able man was found. But after so long a connexion with our church, and such friendship as most of them have all along shown me, how can I rend myself from them against their consent, unless they had a prospect of a speedy and certain supply, of one who would naturally care for their welfare, and who would be concerned to guard them against dangers on the right hand and the left. The men who would truly make void God's law, would rejoice to ensnare some on the one hand, and perhaps some would be drawn off from the doctrines of grace on the other; and I, when I heard of the flock being scattered that was once committed to my care, should faint under my burden, and be unable to do you any service. Dear brethren, I shall ever remember with gratitude, your candour and kindness towards me, but I cannot divide myself, or I would gladly spend and be spent for you. I hope I shall pray for you more than ever, and that our people will do the same. And since you have offered to elect me for your teacher, suffer this once the word of exhortation. Stand fast by each other. Pray much together. Do not be discouraged at the disappointment of not finding me in a moveable state. With God is the residue of the Spirit. He will yet point out to you some person more suitable than him you have once thought of. Or, by pouring out a double portion of his Spirit on the young minister whom you have already among you, and on some other who may assist him, he will show you his marvellous power and grace in a more remarkable manner than you are aware of. Though the Lord cause grief, yet will he have compassion, according to the multitude of his tender

they were joined by the Patrons of the Academy, who requested his acceptance of the Presidentship.

mercies. The set time to favor Zion shall come, when God will repair the breach he has made among you, and make your walls salvation, and your gates praise. Only wait on him, and watch over one another, and you shall find that he waits to be gracious. I pray every blessing to rest upon you evermore, and remain, dear brethren, your much obliged and affectionate servant in the Lord,

JOHN RYLAND."

In a letter addressed at the same time to the Pædobaptist Communicants, he writes,

"MY DEAR CHRISTIAN FRIENDS,

"I sincerely feel for your situation, and am affected with your kind invitation, that I would undertake the oversight of you in the Lord. Were I able to accept the call of your Baptist brethren, I should certainly have no objection to do every thing in my power to subserve your spiritual interests also; having always esteemed the difference of sentiment and practice between you and me, concerning one of the positive institutions of the New Testament, no sufficient ground to refuse a joint participation of the other. It appears to me *so much the nature of the new creature*, (if I may so express myself,) *for true believers to have intimate communion with each other*, that nothing but clear precept or precedent for debarring a mistaken brother from the Lord's table, could induce me to refuse those whom Christ had evidently received, and who could be admitted without any injury to my own exercise of the rights of conscience, or without endangering any privilege of my own. I hope our brethren will be directed, if possible, to some pastor, who will in this respect be like-minded; and till you are sure it will be otherwise, will you not act a prudent and proper part, to keep together, and unite with them in fervent prayer? Be assured, my dear friends, I shall always rejoice to hear of your welfare, and it would give me unspeakable pleasure to hear that you were provided with such a pastor as would be much more likely to edify you, than your sincerely affectionate friend and servant,

JOHN RYLAND."

Few transactions of the kind have been conducted, in a manner so honorable to all the parties concerned ; with so much conscientious regard to the welfare and claims of others, on the one side, and on the other, such generous acquiescence in making a deeply felt sacrifice of private good, from a regard to the general interests of religion. “ We were not sorry,” said his Northampton friends, “ to find that his labours were acceptable to others ; but if a month’s acquaintance made you desirous to obtain him, you cannot wonder that above twenty years should make us unwilling to resign him. We are not disposed to call in question your sincerity, in professing to desire our welfare, though we are sorry that your circumstances have laid you under any necessity to make a proposal, that seems to militate against our interest. You profess, that your application gives you pain on that account, and we are sure that it causes in us somewhat very opposite to pleasure. But though some at first were ready to be offended at your conduct, in making application to the Pastor of another church, who was sincerely loved and valued by his people, and had no occasion or inclination to leave them, yet, on reviewing your pleas, we are more inclined to excuse your request, than to comply with it. Yet we would wish not to

act under a selfish spirit, but to consider the interest of the whole denomination, and to deny ourselves for a greater good, if we were sure that could be procured by the removal of our beloved Pastor." It was not till after a third application had been made, and a suitable successor had been found for his first charge, that Dr. Ryland gave his final assent. "Nothing," he observes in one of his letters, "but the peculiar circumstances of the church, as connected with the Baptist Academy, could have induced me to listen for a moment, to any solicitation to remove from Northampton, though I allow, that to a man *at liberty*, your application without that consideration would have been as worthy of respect as that of any people in the kingdom. But to *me*, every consideration, including that of the Academy, would be insufficient to reconcile my conscience to a removal, before I saw our people in immediate prospect of being provided for comfortably with a successor." In arriving at a decision on this important step, in addition to earnest supplication to the Supreme Source of wisdom, he availed himself of the advice of those of his brethren who were most distinguished for judgment and experience, and with the exception of Mr. Newton, (though even he did not absolutely disapprove of the removal,) they ex-

pressed their conviction that, however painful, duty demanded the sacrifice.* He removed to Bristol,

* Mr. Fuller, who perhaps felt more than any one, the loss of personal intercourse with his friend, expressed his acquiescence in a letter which has already appeared in print. (Vide his Life, by Dr. R. p. 225, Second edition.) Mr. Newton, in a letter, dated April 30, 1792, thus writes: "For myself I have nothing to say further, to what I offered in a general view. I think the removal of ministers from places where they are acceptable and useful is often hazardous, but not always improper. There are some situations to which a young man cannot be supposed to be competent, and he must therefore serve an apprenticeship in an inferior post, till age and experience have qualified him for one more important.—Mr. Booth says, that if you consult only your personal ease and comfort, you will stay where you are, for you will probably meet with more difficulties and exercises at Bristol; but if you regard the good of the whole, and the fairest opportunity of preventing evil, and promoting the common cause, you must and will go. Of this, he is a better judge than I; but you must at last judge for yourself.—I give you full credit for the simplicity and disinterestedness of your views, and your desire to do the Lord's will; and therefore I believe he on whom you depend, and whom you wish to please, will guide your determination to that which is right. When our hearts are upright, he will permit us to make no mistakes but what he will overrule for good. I neither advise nor dissuade; but I seem to think you will go. You need not apologize for Mr. ——'s expression. Undoubtedly, the interest of the gospel is as much the interest of Christ, among the Baptists, as in any other denomination.

"Poor Northampton! and poor Omicron, if you are away when he goes there! With sincere prayers for your guidance,

"I remain, your affectionate friend and brother,

"JOHN NEWTON."

A respectable minister, of another denomination, who is still living, also urged his compliance in the following liberal and friendly manner:—"It gave me no small degree of pleasure when I first heard you were invited to Broadmead, and equal pain when you

with his family, in December, 1793, and on the 15th of May following, a public service, recognizing his union with the church at Broadmead, was held, in which Messrs. Francis of Horsley, Kingdon of

declined accepting the call. I have since heard of a second application, and fearing it would share the fate of the former, I have presumed to step down from my observatory, to intreat you not to reject it hastily. It is my lot to be frequently in Bristol, and my honour to be acquainted with many of the Broadmead people. From long observation, I flatter myself I have a tolerably competent knowledge of their complexion. From all I can gather, you are not only the man of their choice, but I believe their choice is most judiciously made; and I fear, most sincerely fear, that your second refusal will involve not only that church, but the Baptist cause, in circumstances far from pleasant to forebode; and when they arrive, far from pleasant for you to reflect upon. That church requires a pastor of determined sentiment, of real Christian catholicism, of a conciliating disposition, and of a fatherly share of divine experience in the progress of religion on the mind. And does not the Academy require such a man to preside in it? Do not say you are not the man; you are not to be sole judge in this matter, any more than Moses was of the majestic lustre of his face.

“ I would not have you to surmise the hand of Joab to be in this epistle. It is the sole effusion of my own mind, resulting from cool observation, and from a regard to the whole Baptist cause; for though I do not belong to their society, and suppose I never shall, yet I think that they are an association of Christians, which every good man ought to love and bid God speed to.

“ I sincerely condole with you on the loss of the man who gave you being, and set you that Christian pattern, which no doubt often had good effects on your heart. You are not the only loser. The world has lost an upright, honest man; an inviolable friend to the cause of Jesus; a man, whom I not only loved ardently, but in many things admired, and whose memory I shall revere while I have a being. Would God all his children were like him; and all mine too.”

Frome, and Clarke of Exeter, took part. One minister only survives who united in that service, the Rev. Joseph Hughes of Battersea, who, for upwards of two years, shared in the ministerial and academical engagements; and for him it was reserved to attend the funeral of his venerable friend, in the very place where more than thirty years before he had implored the divine benediction on his labours.

Soon after Dr. Ryland's settlement, he preached before the Baptist Western Association at Chard, a discourse, afterwards published, on "The Certain Increase and Glory of the Kingdom of Christ;" in which, by an energetic survey of the prophetic declarations, and of the prospects then opening on the world, he attempted to rouse their attention to missionary efforts. Subsequently, he preached on various public occasions, and in proportion as he became known to his brethren, rose in their respect and esteem, and gradually acquired an ascendancy of the purest kind; which, so far from its being an object of solicitude on his part, his modesty and total freedom from the lust of power would have rendered him unconscious of, had it not necessarily involved a frequent reference for his counsels and assistance, which, as applicable to a very extensive

district, would have allowed him to adopt St. Paul's language, *The care of all the churches is upon me.* In addition to his labours in the Academy and the Church, various benevolent Institutions in Bristol occupied no small share of his attention, particularly the Penitentiary and Religious Tract Society, in originating which he was intimately concerned. During Mr. Fuller's life time, there was no other individual who received so large a proportion of the contributions to the Mission. No one, however, was less disposed to encourage a spurious liberality, by employing any motives not accordant with genuine piety, or tinctured with ostentation and party feeling. In the years 1811 and 1816, he undertook journeys to Scotland on its behalf, and returned deeply impressed with the generosity shown by various denominations of Christians, and by the many marks he received of personal kindness and hospitality. The pleasure afforded by these visits, however, was sensibly diminished, by the previous decease of his highly-esteemed friend, Dr. John Erskine, with whom he had corresponded for about twenty years, and who first made him acquainted with the works of Edwards and other Transatlantic divines. In 1813, he was actively engaged with other friends of Missions, in preparing

Petitions to Parliament on the renewal of the Charter of the East India Company. Though averse to appear as a speaker on public occasions, yet his deep interest in the subject induced him to yield to the solicitations of his friends, to take part in a meeting held at the Guildhall, where he was listened to with the most marked and respectful attention. During the previous consultations which were held on this business, he communicated the outline of a petition to a gentleman of great respectability and influence, a member of the Establishment, and accompanied it with the following remarks :—“ I cannot tell whether the enclosed would satisfy yourself or your connexions in this city. You may think it your *duty* to ask for a regular Establishment, and that upon a more extensive scale than has been already proposed. To this I have no inclination to make any opposition, *provided* it should be attended with liberty to other denominations. I wish our Episcopalian brethren to enjoy every advantage which can naturally result from their numbers, their wealth, their learning, piety, and zeal ; and if all this will not suffice, without such direct aid from the State as may raise them in the eyes of the surrounding population of India, though I cannot directly join in promoting it, yet I have nothing to do in

opposing it. We must labour to equal or surpass them if possible, in other things which we possess in common. If, wherein we differ from them, we are mistaken, we trust, as the Sun of Righteousness rises higher on this benighted globe, we shall detect our errors; and if the mistake lies on their side, the same blessed cure certainly awaits them: it shall be effected in due time. We were greatly delighted at the manifestation of Christian love at their late meetings,* and pray God we may not be behind them in that most excellent grace. The articles in which we are agreed, are far more numerous, and far more important, than those in which we differ, and ought to do more to unite us, than the latter to divide us. I so believe 'the communion of saints,' as to feel myself much more closely united to every one who is sanctified by the truth, than I can be to any one who is unrenewed in the spirit of his mind. They that will live together in one world, illuminated by the glory of God and the Lamb, must be nearer akin, than those who will have a great gulph fixed between them for ever. Perhaps you will excuse me, dear Sir, if I should suggest, that if I were an Episcopalian myself, I should have some remarks

* Alluding to the Anniversary of the Bristol Auxiliary Church Missionary Society.

to make on the expediency of a splendid and extensive Ecclesiastical Establishment for India. I should ask my brethren, Will there not be some danger of mere worldly men obtaining the highest stations in the church, especially if they are made pretty lucrative? and may not such men prove a greater hindrance to zealous Evangelical Clergymen than even to Dissenting missionaries? *Suppose* Diocesan episcopacy to be the primitive mode of church government, yet did the Apostles begin with appointing Bishops, &c. or did they not first preach the gospel, gather churches, elect Presbyters, and then appoint superintendants of districts, who, by degrees acquired more power than the Apostles would have wished them to possess, had they staid on earth to witness the process for two hundred years. If then, good men can influence the first modelling of the Indian church, shall they closely imitate the modern stile? or shall they endeavour to make a nearer approach to what they themselves suppose was the plan in earlier ages? But this is *their* concern. May God most abundantly bless them in all that agrees with *his* will, who is the true Head of the church: all that does not agree, will certainly come down some time."

In 1815, he was called to endure a severe trial in

the removal of his most intimate friend and fellow-labourer, Mr. Fuller. Though he said little as to his feelings on this painful stroke, it was evident that one of the strongest ties to life was broken ; almost the last of the friends of his youth, to whom he had been wont to unbosom his most secret griefs and perplexities, with whom he had matured his views of sacred truth, and united in consultation and prayer for the object nearest their hearts, the extension of the kingdom of Christ, was departed ; and it seemed as if the signal had been given that the termination of his own course on earth could not be far distant. His life was however prolonged ten years, and nothing probably contributed to reconcile him so much to a detention from that state of blessedness to which he aspired as the issue of his labours, and the consummation of his hopes, as to find himself, during nearly the whole of that period, able to continue his services in the cause of God : the divine goodness happily preserved him from what he most dreaded, an old age of protracted inactivity. At a meeting of the Baptist Missionary Society, held at Luton, he was unanimously requested to undertake the office which, under God, had been filled with so much ability and efficiency by his deceased friend. On

account, however, of his other engagements, the late Rev. James Hinton of Oxford, at the annual meeting held at Northampton, in the following October, was united with him in the Secretaryship, in whom he found an able and harmonious coadjutor. "I perceive," remarked the latter, "that you and I always think and pray alike, respecting the Mission, most exactly." In the course of two years, Mr. Hinton, from the pressure of other avocations and declining health, was compelled to resign, and was succeeded by the present Secretary, the Rev. John Dyer.

From the period last mentioned, Dr. Ryland's life was marked by few incidents, by none at least which are suited to furnish materials for the present narrative; not that his exertions were very considerably diminished; for, excepting that by the removal of the seat of the Mission to the metropolis, the greater proportion of labour was laid upon the resident Secretary, he still devoted himself to his pastoral and academical duties, and to those numerous demands on his time relative to various religious and benevolent objects, to which his station and the deference paid to his character, subjected him, with an equable intensity of application, which might well excite the admiration and self-reproach, and

provoke the emulation of many in the full vigour of their days. Naturally of a sound and healthy constitution, he had taken the best method of preserving its strength unbroken, by the practice of early rising, and by a systematic temperance, which, without being ascetic, was certainly more strict than what usually passes under the name. It was not till he had completed his 68th year, that his health began visibly to decline. In the autumn of 1821, he made a visit to Watchett, from which he derived considerable benefit. About the same season in the following year, symptoms of languor and debility again appeared, which he sought to relieve by visiting Teignmouth; this excursion was not equally beneficial with the former one, yet he was able to preach every Sunday, at that place and the neighbouring village of Shaldon. In returning, he took part in the designation of Mr. Thomas Knibb, as a Missionary to Jamaica, at Exeter, and gave the charge from Acts xxii. 21. with great animation and fervour. In the summer of 1823, he went as far as Liverpool, where he made a collection for the Mission; at Leeds, he attended the ordination of Mr. James Acworth, as co-pastor with the Rev. Thomas Langdon, the late amiable and excellent minister of the Baptist church in that place; he also

paid a final visit to his friends at Northampton, and preached in several of the neighbouring villages, the scenes of his early labours. Though absent from home only three weeks, he preached not fewer than seventeen times. In fact, the exertion of the voice in public speaking, was far from producing exhaustion to the degree which is commonly felt on such occasions; on the whole, he considered it as beneficial, and as counteractive in some measure, of the injurious tendency of a sedentary life: owing to a tenderness of the feet, he suffered much more from walking a short distance or from the effort of standing in the pulpit; and during the latter years of his life used to sit in addressing his own congregation. Still, however, the bodily infirmities of age continued to make their silent advance. Among other indications, his hand-writing began to lose its bold and regular character, a circumstance to which he adverted in addressing an old correspondent, remarking, at the same time, that he viewed it as a delightful intimation of his approaching entrance on a state from which debility, under every form, would be excluded. The following year, the state of his own health and that of some members of his family, induced him to form the intention of resigning his situation as resident Tutor in the Academy, and he

made a proposal to that effect to the Committee. Subsequently however, it appeared, that circumstances not at first anticipated would render such a measure undesirable both for his own comfort and the welfare of the Institution ; he accordingly yielded to the wishes of his friends, who were anxious that one whom they so venerated and loved, should end his days in the station which he had long occupied with so much honour and success. The autumn of 1824 passed with fewer unfavourable symptoms than the preceding. In December, however, he took a severe cold, which marked the commencement of his last illness.* This did not prevent his addressing a sermon to young people, with his usual earnestness and affection, on the first Lord's day in the new year, from Eccles. xi. 9. which will be found in the first volume of these Remains. Through the month he continued to decline ; and on the 30th, the day

* From the first appearance of indisposition, his esteemed friend, Dr. Stock, attended him with the greatest assiduity. About Easter, in compliance with the wishes of his friends, who were anxious that nothing which professional skill could effect should be neglected, the services of another eminent physician, Dr. Prichard, were added. Though the decay of nature allowed only of expedients for rendering the approach to its fatal termination less rapid and painful, it will ever be remembered with gratitude and satisfaction, by Dr. R.'s family and connexions, that, at every step, whatever palliatives the circumstances allowed, were devised and administered with the utmost ability and kindness.

after he had completed his 72d year, closed his public services of above half a century, by a discourse from Psalm lxxxvi. 5. "Thou Lord, art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy to all them that call upon thee." He spoke with great earnestness, but his evident exhaustion produced in the minds of his hearers the most painful apprehension that they should hear the voice of their pastor no more. During the ensuing week, he prepared a funeral discourse for the wife of a young minister who had studied under him, (Mr. David Souter of Aberdeen,) on Ps. lxxiii. 24. "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory," hoping to deliver it on the following Sabbath; but his friends perceived that he was wholly inadequate to the exertion, and prevailed on him to give up the design. Though unable to go out, he continued to meet the Students as usual till the end of March. In April, he received a letter from his much esteemed friend and correspondent, Dr. Charles Stuart of Edinburgh, accompanied with a copy of Mr. Douglas's work, on "The Advancement of Society in Knowledge and Religion," which he read with much interest. He chiefly employed his time, as his debility would allow, in reading, besides the Scriptures, the Life and Remains of

the Rev. Thomas Scott, thus refreshing his mind with the memorials of a friendship, which he expected, at no distant interval to renew, and to enjoy for ever.*

In the early part of his illness, he was affected with great difficulty of breathing, approaching sometimes to a sense of suffocation. This was succeeded by a violent cough and loss of appetite. Still, some hopes were indulged that a change of air might be beneficial; Bath † and Weston-super-Mare were tried for this purpose, but without avail. His journey to the latter place, on the 11th of May, was excessively fatiguing, and as no salutary result ensued, he was conveyed back to his own house on Thursday, in the following week, being then reduced so low, that it seemed very doubtful whether, with all the precautions that tender and sympathising friendship could devise, he would be able to sustain the fatigue

* “ My acquaintance with Mr. Scott, began Oct. 12, 1779, when he came over to Northampton, to visit my father and Mr. Hall of Arnsby.”—Dr. R.’s MS. Diary.

† At Bath Dr. and Mrs. R. were very kindly received by Opie Smith, Esq. and met with the most friendly attention from himself and every member of his family. At Weston-super-Mare, he was visited by his friend, Dr. Rippon, with whom he had been intimately acquainted ever since the year 1771, and who gave one proof, in addition to many others, of his affectionate regard, by taking a journey for the purpose.

of a removal. From the time of his return, he appeared to have given up all expectation of recovery, and on the following Sunday, having enquired what day it was, briefly but emphatically expressed his desire for the last hour. But on no occasion was there the least symptom of impatience; nothing appeared but a child-like and tranquil resignation to the Divine will. Had he been disposed to communicate much of his feelings, his great debility would have rendered it impracticable. The few expressions which fell from his lips were strongly marked by his habitual modesty and humility; but he was chiefly occupied in offering up brief petitions or devout ejaculations. One passage of scripture, “My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever,” was often repeated by him, in the original Hebrew.

While at Weston, he said to a friend, “I am a dull, cold, formal, poor creature; I hope I have known the truth, and have endeavoured to maintain it unmixed and in its purity, and to spread it extensively, but I have not felt its influence sufficiently in my own heart.” He was reminded that he had not only *known* the truth, but *loved* it, and *gloried* in it. He replied with great earnestness, “I hope I have; yes—I hope I have.” On the day after his return,

when one of his family inquired whether he had any doubts or fears, he replied, "I cannot say I have, but great cause for self-abasement." In the afternoon, a friend with whom he had enjoyed, for several years, the most gratifying intercourse, both in public and private, called; to whom he said, "I have no strength;" his friend reminded him, "He who has *all* strength is with you:" after remaining silent a few minutes, he, with some difficulty, but very distinctly, repeated a few lines from a hymn by Toplady.

"When he makes his jewels up
Not a saint shall wanting be:
O my God, fulfil my hope,
And with them reckon me!"

On one occasion, he inquired for a Bible, and on being asked what part he wished to be read, mentioned the 14th chapter of Hosea; when the 3d verse was finished, he repeated the last two words "*findeth mercy.*" Seeing some of his family greatly distressed, he said, "Keep near the Lord, my dear children, and *He* will be with you." Frequently he was heard to offer up such petitions as these: "Spirit of Christ, take of the things of Christ and show them to my soul." "Lord! direct my heart into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ." "Pity me, and lay me low in the dust, for Jesus'

sake," repeating with great emphasis the words "*for Jesus' sake.*" "Grant me an easy dismissal into thy heavenly kingdom." The last words that he was heard to utter, were "*No more pain.*" No particular alteration took place till early on Wednesday, May 25, when respiration became more hurried and irregular, and about 10 A. M. he 'fell asleep,' with a composure and serenity that no language can describe.

By Dr. Ryland's own desire, his remains were interred in a spot adjoining the Meeting-house in Broadmead. The last offices of affection and respect were performed on Thursday, June 2d, in a manner very gratifying and soothing to the feelings of those who were most deeply interested. Vast numbers who witnessed the procession evinced, by their respectful silence and decorum, the general veneration in which he was held, and in the crowded assembly which filled the Meeting-house, each one appeared to mourn the loss of a father and a friend. The Rev. Joseph Hughes of Battersea, and the Rev. Thomas Roberts of Bristol, engaged in prayer, and the Rev. Isaiah Birt of Birmingham, delivered a very appropriate and affecting address. The Funeral Sermon by Mr. Hall, was delivered on the morning of the following Sunday. By the publication of that

Discourse, the public are already in possession of a full delineation of Dr. Ryland's character, drawn with equal ability and correctness, which, as a memorial of departed excellence, will amply compensate for the deficiencies of the preceding narrative. A few miscellaneous facts and observations only will be added.

Dr. Ryland was twice married; in the first instance on January 12, 1780, to Miss Elizabeth Tyler, daughter of Mr. Robert Tyler, of Banbury, described by those who knew her intimately, as a most amiable and excellent woman, the loveliness of whose personal appearance strikingly corresponded with her mental endowments. After a connexion of seven years, she was removed by a consumptive disorder, January 23, 1787, a few weeks subsequent to the birth of her only child, who yet survives. Her bereaved partner, while he was enabled to bear this stroke with devout submission, felt it with that poignant and tender sorrow which would naturally flow from a heart distinguished for susceptibility and benevolence. He gave vent to his grief, in several poetical compositions, which, whatever may be their other merits or defects, are marked with the most genuine pathos. In some of them, addressed to his infant son, he solicitously introduces such reflections

as would be fitted to lead his mind at a maturer age to that Divine Source, to which, in this and in every other season of affliction, he himself was indebted for his choicest consolations.*

* He received the following consolatory letter from Mr. Newton, a few days after Mrs. Ryland's decease.

DEAR SIR,

“ ——— ‘ While the child was yet living, I fasted and prayed, but *now*, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again?’ I have pitied, and do pity you. But the Lord's will is now made known by the event; and as we are sure that he is wise and good, we are of course assured, that he does and appoints all things *well*; *καλῶς beautifully*; so that it could not possibly be mended. If you listen to the voice of faith, it will speak this language in your ears. And if sense, or self, or unbelief should dare to mutter, regard them not. They are neither competent nor impartial witnesses.

“ You have received a wound, but faithful is the Friend who has wounded you. Every circumstance attending it, was adjusted with consummate wisdom. Knives and caustics in the hand of an enemy would be formidable; but we can trust a surgeon to use them, if our case requires it, and if we are persuaded of his ability and integrity. Your wound must be painful for a time, but the Lord will not leave you; he will condescend to visit you: he will, if I may so speak, dress your wound, till it be effectually healed. In the meanwhile, beware of grief; it is insinuating, deceitful, hurtful. Attend to your health and your calling. Ride, walk, talk; change air and objects now and then. Time, prayer, and especially praise, will relieve you. You are a soldier, you are a leader in the Lord's army, and private concern must give way to the public cause. The enemy presses at the gates, and must be repelled. The Lord's flock must be fed and guarded from the wolves. Time is short and eternity approaching. You may drop a tear, but I hope you will be enabled to weep as if you wept not. These are truths; though, as I hinted before, I ought to offer them with a just sense of my own inability to apply them to myself, were your case my own. But

He entered a second time, June 18, 1789, into the conjugal relation with Frances, eldest daughter of Mr. William Barrett of Northampton, who, after having for nearly six and thirty years been permitted to share his joys and sorrows, has been called to make a surrender of her chief earthly felicity, but can look back with fervent gratitude to heaven for so long and inestimable an union ; and, though its dissolution be irreparable on this side the grave, is sustained and consoled by the assurance, that “ them who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.”* It is also no inconsiderable alleviation, to

has not the Lord promised strength according to our day ? And is he not all-sufficient ? And does he not know our frame, and remember that we are but dust ?

“ I am going this morning to preach concerning one, who stood like a criminal at Pilate’s bar, despised and rejected of men, insulted, tormented. Oh, for a realizing sense of what he submitted to, for our sakes ! Then surely we shall say,

Our sufferings are not worth a thought,

When, Lord, compared to thine !

This service must shorten my letter ; but I was willing to let you know that I am not unmindful of you. May the Lord be with you, and with your affectionate friend,

“ JOHN NEWTON.

London, Feb. 2, 1787.

* His own views, at the time of forming these connexions, and on a retrospect, are thus described in his Diary. “ If ever I sought the glory of God in any action of my life, I am sure it was in this. I regarded sincere piety in the choice of a companion, more than

know, that his memory is embalmed in the hearts of an affectionate people, who have not been wanting in giving the best proof of the strength and sincerity of their attachment to the departed, by a regard to the interests and welfare of the living.

Of Dr. Ryland's domestic character little need be said; its general features may be easily conjectured. That benevolence and that piety, which through a long life were exerted so powerfully on more distant and public objects, lost none of their intensity within the narrower limits of a family. As a husband and a father, his feelings, to the very close of life, operated with an exquisite warmth, tenderness, and simplicity. In the education of his children, of whom one son and three daughters were the offspring of the second marriage, he lost no time, and as far as his other duties permitted, spared no pains, in imbuing them with the elements and the love of knowledge; of that knowledge especially, which is the beginning and consummation of wisdom. Many persons, possibly, have excelled him in a facility for any other consideration whatever. It was my chief concern to be united with one whose heart was united to Christ, and who would help me to devote myself wholly to him. I can confidently say, both of my first and second marriage, that I acted in the fear of God; and I have abundant reason to bless God for the happy consequences of both."

insinuating serious reflections into the minds of the young, either by writing or conversation ; but, however this may be, it was the happiness of those who enjoyed the privilege of constant intercourse with so revered a parent, to receive lessons of piety in language far more powerful than that of the lips, the language of a life pre-eminently “ influenced and directed by the powers of the world to come.” The great objects of faith were to him indeed living and ever present realities ; and the world and the things of the world, when viewed in comparison with these celestial verities, or as dissociated from them, were in his esteem, mere atoms or shadows of existence. Not that he indulged in a vain abstraction from the concerns of life. On the contrary, whatever could affect the temporal welfare of others met with a ready sympathy in his breast ; and, as Mr. Hall observes, “ his sensibility extended not only to his own species, but pervaded the whole circle of animated nature.” But he felt, alike for himself and for all, that the one great object before them was to prepare for a happy immortality. It was in this spirit, that in addressing his own Students, and afterwards those of the Stepney Institution, he remarked, “ An ancient painter once exclaimed, ‘ *I paint for eternity.*’ Ah ! he knew not that the

earth and all it contains would be burnt up ; and though that awful catastrophe has not yet taken place, the admirable productions of his art have long since perished. But you, my young brethren, may adopt the language of this eminent artist, and it shall be no vain boast, no expression of enthusiasm, but the words of truth and soberness. For the image of Christ, which, by your instrumentality, the Spirit of God shall paint on the soul, will bear no symptoms of decay through millions of ages, but shall shine, in more vivid colours, when the sun shall be turned into darkness. Oh ! think of eternity ! Keep eternity in view, and the immensity of bliss, to be enjoyed by every soul which by your means shall be converted to God ! This is the Redeemer's recompence, and you shall enter into his joy."

That charity, for which he was so distinguished, was as correct as it was extensive in its operation. *It rejoiced not in iniquity, but rejoiced in the truth.* Towards those whose errors, either in principle or conduct, appeared most perilous, it manifested itself in unfeigned compassion, and whenever the attempt was practicable, in earnest efforts to convince and reclaim them. In reference to his fellow-christians, he regarded the magnitude far more than

the number of points of agreement ; in proportion as he saw the great essentials of religion pervading and moulding the character, his feelings of attachment were elicited and confirmed, whatever difference might exist on subordinate topics. Hence, few individuals shared a larger portion of his esteem and affection than some from whom he decidedly and widely differed on questions of ecclesiastical polity ; and others, whose variance in their doctrinal views did not affect the grounds of his hope for eternity—the divinity, incarnation, and atoning sacrifice of the Redeemer, and who evinced that *they had been all made to drink into one Spirit*. He was deeply grieved whenever he beheld talent and energy expended in defence or propagation of peculiarities relating to the externals of religion, to the almost total neglect of its renovating and sanctifying purposes. Of an individual who had fallen into this error, he familiarly but expressively remarked, “ His manner is mild, but his pertinacity great. All his attention is occupied with new sins and new duties, for the sake of which he would divide the church, and leave the devil to run away with the world ; suspending in great measure his zeal *for* duties and *against* sins, which are universally allowed to be such.” For the denomination, in which he occupied

so conspicuous a station, it was his earnest desire, that an anxiety for the adoption of their distinguishing tenet (though none, he conceived, was supported by stronger evidence) should in no instance, even appear to come into competition with the promotion of vital piety, and the successful issue of their efforts *to turn sinners from the error of their ways*. Yet, when circumstances seemed to demand a defence of their principles, he was not backward to appear on their behalf; and in his “Candid Statement,” gave a succinct and comprehensive exposition of the reasons of their practice, in a manner which it has never been denied fully corresponded with its title. The Preface contains, in reference to a subject which has since received the most ample investigation, (the union of Baptists and Pædobaptists at the Lord’s Supper,) a specimen of that ingenuity he was always ready to exercise in putting a favourable construction on the views of those who differed from him. It is well known that he always practised Mixed Communion; and though he never published any thing on the question, his convictions of its agreement with the spirit of the gospel, and the principles of forbearance as laid down in the apostolic writings, were as strong as those of its powerful and eloquent advocate. It

may be mentioned as a proof of the genuineness of the friendship that subsisted between himself and Mr. Fuller, that he frequently expressed his sentiments on the subject in the most unreserved manner to the latter, who, if he did not see reason to alter his opinion, certainly felt not the slightest diminution of cordiality from the freedom of such remonstrances. “Surely,” said Dr. Ryland, “this is not the time” (when the loss by fire at Serampore had been so liberally repaired) “*to begin denying the visibility of the church, except among ourselves.* I hope, however, that he who can see somewhat of Christ in a cup of cold water given to a disciple in the name of a disciple, can see somewhat of that which is from above, in what has been given us by many who follow not with us. Well! I am going to preach from that text, ‘Surely, I come quickly! Amen, even so, come Lord Jesus.’ Amen! Amen! I could almost rejoice to leave such a contentious world, and contentious church. Split, divide, and sub-divide! The serpent’s head is bruised, but he has not yet lost all his cunning, and this is his favourite maxim still.”

He gratified his sentiments of Christian regard, by maintaining an extensive correspondence with ministers of various denominations. By this means

he acquired much information relative to the state of religion in foreign parts; especially in the United States of America, a country for which he felt a strong attachment, not only on account of its original relations, civil and religious, to his own, but as having had the honor of producing one of the profoundest theologians, and one of the most devoted Missionaries, the world ever saw—Jonathan Edwards and David Brainerd. Through the medium of Dr. Erskine, he opened a correspondence with the son of the former, Dr. Edwards, in the year 1785, which included discussions on many interesting theological topics; some extracts from it will be found in the collected edition of Edwards's Works. This led to a communication, though less intimate, with several other persons of eminence, among whom were Drs. Hopkins, West, Hart, and Dwight.

The Bristol Academy, when Dr. Ryland was nominated President, and for ten succeeding years, was the only Institution of the kind in the Baptist denomination; so that no inconsiderable proportion of the ministers now living, were educated under his direction: the number, at the present time, is probably not less than one hundred and twenty. As a proof of the filial veneration in which he was held by the Students, it may be stated that he was called

to preach Ordination Sermons more frequently than perhaps any other minister of his time, amounting in all to seventy-seven. The general impression made by his conduct in the capacity of Tutor, on those who received his instructions, will be described in the words of one of their number,* who thus expresses himself.

“ Loving him and revering him as I did, it gives me real consolation and delight to express the deep and tender veneration I cherish for his memory, and to trace my recollections of the wisdom and excellence he manifested towards me and many others, while under his care. I never left any place with so much regret as I quitted, ten years since, the house over which he presided. To the end of life, and most likely for ever, I shall retain a grateful and delightful remembrance of the inestimable benefits I derived from his tuition and friendship. No Tutor could be more loved and revered ; none could more highly deserve it. The sentiment indulged towards him by us all, and that most deeply by the most pious and cultivated of our number, was a deep and affectionate veneration for his character, together with gratitude for the tenderness and fidelity with which he performed his various

* The Rev. WILLIAM RHODES, of Damerham.

duties among us. His whole behaviour impressed us with the serious and delightful conviction, that he not only did his utmost to promote our mental advancement, and watched over our progress with benignant complacency, but that our improvement in piety was an object of fervent solicitude to his holy and devotional mind. Not to mention the sweet and commanding influence which the holiness of his deportment exerted, such was the simplicity and mildness which pervaded his constant intercourse with us, that the awe which so much goodness and mental vigour naturally tended to inspire was absorbed in cordial affection for him, as our best earthly friend. It was no small part of his praise, that with scarcely any exertion of authority he secured in general a ready compliance with his requisitions and wishes.

“ It never appeared to me a serious defect in his plan of tuition, that he never read any Theological Lectures of his own to the Students.* If it were

* Though Dr. R. owing to his other engagements, gave no original series of Theological Lectures, he went through a course of reading on Theology, Ecclesiastical History, Jewish Antiquities, and Rhetoric. Besides the Hebrew language, his department included in part the Latin Classics. His colleagues, (besides a Mathematical Tutor since 1805,) were the Assistant Minister of Broadmead for the time being, and Mr. Isaac James, son of the late Rev. Samuel James of Hitchin, who, in consequence of his

any defect at all, it was compensated to a very great extent by his preaching, on which we attended, and which, as every one knows, was of a highly vigorous and intellectual, as well as of a very devotional, cast.* We thus received from him, his enlarged

advanced age and state of health, resigned his office in 1825. The Rev. T. S. Crisp has succeeded as President and Theological Tutor; the Classical and Mathematical departments have been united, and are filled by the Rev. William Anderson.

* Of the general style and qualities of his preaching, these volumes exhibit such ample specimens, that an attempt to anticipate the judgment of the reader may be well spared. But the Editor is induced to insert one extract from a sermon on Jer. li. 9. ("We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed,") as very characteristic of the writer, and exhibiting a striking union of fidelity and tenderness. "O my hearers! I pray God this lamentation may not be applicable to you. I am sure you want healing. I am afraid that you are not all healed. I am sure I long for your salvation, for your eternal salvation. Numberless defects have attended my ministry; but I have laboured to recommend Christ to you. I do, in the presence of God my Judge, profess that I should count it great gain to win one soul to Christ. I do not seek yours, but you. If it might really bring you to Christ, I could wish my abilities were far greater, to do justice to his glorious character, and to display the riches of his grace. But merely to gain your applause as an eloquent man, a fine preacher, or whatever epithet of the same kind might be used, would not satisfy me. No: I had rather be among you in much weakness, hesitation, and embarrassment, still worse than I often am, and be owned as the means of bringing you to be decided for God, than gain any applause while your souls are not saved.

"Here are many whom I know not personally; and other necessary engagements prevent my spending the time in personal visits, which might otherwise be so employed. Perhaps, also, if I had more time, I should be found less skilful in private addresses than many other ministers; but Christ the crucified, has been

and luminous views of nearly all the great topics of divine truth, mingled with the fervor of impression

repeatedly set before you ; you have been warned that there is salvation in no other ; you have been assured that he is able and willing to save. The necessity of repentance and faith, and the nature of the fruits meet for repentance, have been often represented. These truths are also confirmed by the testimony of many witnesses, who long for your healing. And is it so ? Will you not be healed ? Will you not be made whole ?

“ But why, you ask, should I suspect this to be the case ? Why should I be uncharitable ? I would not be uncharitable. But, as charity to the poor does not consist in believing all to be rich, so charity to souls does not consist in believing all to be safe. Do I confine religion to my own party, do you ask ? What do you mean ? I have the highest opinion of many conscientious Christians, who differ from me on various subjects. But I do account that a man must believe in Christ, or he cannot be saved. Can a man be a Christian, and not depart from all iniquity ? not crucify the flesh ? not overcome the world ? not fight the fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life ? Can the life of God exist in the soul of the prayerless ? Can any man serve God and Mammon ? ”

The following extract from Dr. R.'s Diary belongs to an early part of the Memoir, but was accidentally omitted :—

“ In the latter end of May, 1775, I first met with the Life of David Brainerd, which I read with great interest, and I trust, with humiliation and profit. I had some time before this felt the like from reading Edwards on the Affections. How deficient am I in the power of godliness, which was so eminently possessed by that servant of Christ ! Oh ! how little have I of the spirit of prayer ! and when I find my heart a little more affected, I find myself in danger of resting satisfied with that, instead of continually panting after more and more nearness to God. I felt myself stirred up, about last Christmas, by reading Joseph Alleine's Works, but the impression too soon wore off. I have sometimes freedom in preaching, especially at Kingsthorpe, and feel a degree of earnestness and warmth ; but after the Sabbath is over, my deadness returns. So that though I am not often greatly distressed, I am frequently puzzled to know what judgment to form of my state. Many may

produced by public address ;—the best mode perhaps of imbibing the sentiments of a revered instructor, securing at once intellectual and devotional improvement.

“ Above all, I delight to remember his morning prayers in the family. From his secret communion with God, he came to them with a freshness and

think well of me, because I preach the truth with a loud voice, and sometimes labour to come close to the consciences of my hearers ; but surely my love for souls is very defective ; only I have learnt in some measure what is right. God, I believe, gives me some success, for which I am far from feeling proper thankfulness. Oh ! that I may not eye my own glory more than the glory of God, and deceive myself with a counterfeit religion, originating and terminating in *self*. I often think of that expression, ‘ One sinner destroyeth much good.’ So may one lukewarm professor ; and doubtless, my dullness may greatly injure others. Hence, I have often wished to keep away from our experience meetings ; not, I trust, lest our people should think ill of me, but lest, thinking well of me, and yet hearing from me so often the same heartless complaints, they should be encouraged to feel satisfied with the same dull frame which their minister so often mentions. I fear, lest the reading of Brainerd’s Life should be the occasion of my working up myself to a higher pitch of apparent ardor, merely from a conviction of my need of it, without my really possessing it.”

Nothing has been found in Dr. Ryland’s papers relative to the Prophecies, excepting the following remark, in a letter to Mr. Fuller, April, 1815 :—

“ God’s hand is visible in these events. What he is about to do, I know not, but wish to *watch*, and mind my *own* business. I think the fourth vial has surely been pouring out for twenty years past ; if that is nearly over, Italy, or the very foundations of Popery, will soon feel the fifth ; (Rev. xvi. 10, 11.) Turkey the sixth ; and then will follow some violent opposition to the gospel, from Pagans, Papists, and Mahometans, at once.”

joy, which showed how much of heaven dwelt within him. Nothing could exceed their humble fervour and simplicity. They expressed, in the most touching and devotional manner, the qualities which formed the peculiar beauty of his religious character. He combined the tender contrition of an early penitent, with the holy maturity and grandeur of an aged saint. And as *he* was, such were his prayers. The lowly and reverential aspirations of ‘a broken and contrite spirit’ were blended with the calm confidence and inward peace of one who had long enjoyed the most intimate converse with God. This union always struck me as a beautiful peculiarity of his social devotions.

“With all the devout regard and admiration in which he was deservedly held by the whole circle of those who knew him, and by very many who had no personal intercourse with him, it does not appear to me, that the strong and luminous character of his mind, or the wide and varied range of his knowledge, were in general sufficiently appreciated. Nor is it to be wondered at. His piety was so transcendently conspicuous, that his other qualities and attainments were hardly thought of by any one while in his society, or in the contemplation of his character. A rare and felicitous distinction rested upon

him ; to every beholder, his mental endowments and acquisitions were almost eclipsed by the brightness and purity of the sanctity which pervaded them. May all those who so long enjoyed the delightful advantage of beholding his example, and of sharing in his prayers, aspire to attain a near resemblance to his blessed character."

J. E. R.

*Mill-Hill,
December 21, 1827.*

P. S. The Editor trusts that no apology will be deemed necessary by the venerable Writer, for the insertion of the following letter, addressed to the Widow of his friend and brother, which contains so gratifying a testimonial of their mutual regard :—

Serampore, Oct. 28th, 1826.

" ——— You must, before this, have frequently wondered that I have not written to condole with you, under your heavy affliction, and I can make no apology for the neglect except one, which ought to have had the contrary effect. That, however, is the true reason why I have not written to you, and scarcely to any one else in England.

“ Ever since I have heard of the death of my very dear friend, certainly the dearest to me of any man in the world, England has appeared a blank. I recollect a few persons who were known to me, and I highly esteem them. I have heard much of many who have been raised up in the church, since I left England; their names stand high in general estimation, but they are personally unknown to me, and I to them. I have two sisters living, and one of them has a large family; I love my sisters, but still I can scarcely fix my mind on a single individual in England, to whom my heart runs voluntarily, and in whose life I live.

“ As it respected my late very dear Brother Ryland, it was far different. He, in conjunction with my dear Brethren Fuller, Sutcliff, and Mr. Hall, sen. was the guide of my unexperienced youth, my faithful counsellor, and my staunch friend; our esteem for each other was reciprocal. He was scarcely ever forgotten in my prayers; and I believe I was scarcely ever forgotten in his. I felt a lively interest in all his joys and sorrows, so far as I knew them; and no man felt a more lively interest than he in the undertaking to which I have devoted myself. He has left the world and is gone to glory. I hope to meet him there, and with him, ‘ in transporting joy

recount the labours of our feet.' I must mourn and struggle with difficulties some time longer, but how much longer is quite uncertain. May I persevere to the end.

“I received your kind letter of ———, after a very long time, and also Mr. Hall's Sermon on the death of my late dear friend. The ship in which they were sent, was lost at the Cape, and the letter and the Sermon had suffered by the water, but were intelligible. Most sincerely, do I condole with you on your loss, and most heartily do I congratulate you on the circumstance of your having been preserved so long, to partake of all the joys and sorrows of a man so highly favored of God, and so dear to all the churches. After a little time you will join his society in the regions of immortality, and will then be separated no more.

“The last letter I received from him, written with a trembling hand, was followed in a week or two by an account of his removal. I endeavoured to improve the event, and that of a very dear young Missionary, Mr. Albrecht, a native of Dresden, who was removed just as the news reached Serampore, by preaching a Funeral Sermon for them both, from 2 Cor. v. 1, 2. Since that I have had no heart to write to England.

“ I was this week much affected by receiving the First Volume of *Pastoral Memorials*, and particularly on seeing it inscribed to me by the family of my very dear friend, as a token of the sincere affection to each other which reigned in both our hearts. I can think of nothing which would have been more suited to my feelings, than that mark of respect for me, and testimony of what never can be obliterated from my heart. I request you will accept my best thanks for it, and convey the same to every member of the family.

I am very affectionately yours,

W. CAREY.”

On the Death of the late venerable and excellent

DR. RYLAND.

Lo ! another saint is fled !

He has fought, and has prevail'd !
Heaven her portal wide has spread,
And our ransom'd Brother hail'd !

Often in the House of Prayer,
We our hearts together rais'd ;
Often we forgot our care,
While we God our Maker prais'd.

When he urg'd the Better Choice,
Spoke of Heaven, or warn'd of Hell ;
When we heard his earnest voice
On the Saviour's mercy dwell ;

Joy to nobler worlds allied,
Warm'd our heart, and fill'd our breast ;
Oh ! our Father, Friend, and Guide !
Blessings on thy memory rest !

Shall thy solemn words, and kind,
Strangely to oblivion pass ?
Leave no traces on our mind,
Like an image on the glass ?

To augment thy joys untold,
Gazing from thy blissful sphere,
May the fruits, a thousand fold,
In our hearts and lives appear !

If *one* soul a Crown will gain,
Taught from future wrath to flee,
What reward wilt thou obtain
For the *many* born to thee !

Shepherd ! child-like ! faithful ! wise !

(Only to thyself severe !)

With whose name will ever rise

Sympathies that wake the tear ;

Our communion now is o'er,

We thy face shall never view

'Till we meet on yonder shore

And our intercourse renew.

We the same mysterious road

Thou hast trodden, soon must tread ;

We are hastening back to God,

Through the regions of the dead !

May our zeal, like thine, be fir'd

From the Hope that cannot fail ;

May the Faith which thee inspir'd

Cheer us in the Gloomy Vale !

May our Peace be found the same

When to Jordan's billows led !

To the Followers of the Lamb—

Death is not the King of Dread !

J. C.

LIST OF DR. RYLAND'S WORKS.

The Articles marked * are out of print.

- 1.*—*God's Experimental Probation of Intelligent Agents.* A Sermon, preached at Kettering, 1780.
- 2.*—*Christ Manifested, and Satan Frustrated.* At Northampton, December 25, 1781.
- 3.*—*The Blessedness of the Dead who die in the Lord.* Preached at Sheepshead, on the Death of the Rev. W. Guy, 1783.
- 4.*—*Seasonable Hints to a Bereaved Church.* Preached at Sheepshead, 1783. Occasioned by the Death of Rev. W. Guy.
- 5.*—*Paul's Charge to the Corinthians, respecting their Treatment of Timothy, applied to the Conduct of Churches towards their Pastors.* To the Church at Thorn, at the Ordination of the Rev. Robert Fawkenner, 1787.
- 6.*—*The Law not against the Promises of God.* At Leicester, 1787.
- 7.*—*Christ the Great Source of the Believer's Consolation, and the Grand Subject of the Gospel Ministry.* On the Death of the Rev. Joshua Symonds, Bedford, 1788.
- 8.*—*Salvation Finished, as to its Impetration, at the Death of Christ ; and, with respect to its Application, at the Death of the Christian.* On the Death of the Rev. Robert Hall, Arnsby, 1791.
- 9*—*The Earnest Charge and Humble Hope of an Affectionate Pastor.* Substance of Three Discourses at Northampton, 1793.
- 10.*—*The Certain Increase of the Glory and Kingdom of Jesus.* Association at Chard, 1794.
- 11.*—*The Duty of Ministers to be Nursing Fathers to the Church.* A Charge to the Rev. W. Belsher, Worcester, 1796.
- 12.*—*The Dependence of the whole Law and the Prophets on the Two Primary Commandments.* Association at Salisbury, 1798.
- 13.*—*The Promised Presence of Christ with his People, a Source of Consolation under the most Painful Bereavements.* On the Death of the Rev. Samuel Pearce, Birmingham, 1799.
- 14.*—*The Presence of Christ the Source of Eternal Bliss.* On the Death of the Rev. Benjamin Francis, M. A. Horsley, 1799.
- 15.*—*The Duty of Christians, with Reference to their Deceased Ministers.* On the Death of the Rev. John Sharp, Bristol, 1800.
- 16.*—*The First Lie Refuted: or, The Grand Delusion Exposed.* At Carter Lane, Southwark, 1800.
- 17.—*The Partiality and Unscriptural Direction of Socinian Zeal.* A Reply to a Letter, by the Rev. John Rowe, of Bristol, occasioned by a Note contained in the above Sermon, 1801.

LIST OF DR. RYLAND'S WORKS.

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Erratum.

MEMOIR.—Page 3, line 4, *for* Lord Dartmouth, *read* Lord Dorchester.

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PASTORAL MEMORIALS.

I.

GOD A JEALOUS GOD.

EXOD. xxxiv. 14.

For thou shalt worship no other God: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

AN infidel writer, who has lately made a secret and insidious attack upon divine revelation, while he affects not to dispute its authenticity, nor to oppose Christianity, alleges, that he is compelled to believe that the histories of the Old Testament are either impositions on the credulity of mankind, or else that they are chiefly, if not entirely, allegorical compositions. 'The Platos, the Ciceros, and the Senecas of the Pagan world,' says he, 'would probably have been astonished, if they had been assured that the following sentences had proceeded from the highest intelligence: "For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God." Exod. xx. 5. "I will bring evil upon this place." 2 Kings xxii. 16. "Mine anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place." Jer. vii. 20.' It is certain, however, that these sages of antiquity never did express any disgust, horror, or indignation at their own poets, who represented the innumerable objects of their worship, of different sexes, as gratifying their sensual appetites in the most irregular manner, as giving occasion for the lowest kind of jealousy, and indulging the bitterest and most groundless

resentments. On the contrary, the Old-testament writers, though they represent God's displeasure against sin, by strong figures, taken from human passions, yet never represent Jehovah as being angry without cause ; they describe him as displeased only with sin ; and consider all sin as hateful in his sight, and bringing down his righteous judgments. They enforce the most extensive, pure, and useful morality ; and prohibit all injustice toward men, as well as idolatry ; and reject all ceremonial religion as worthless, when disconnected with moral obedience. It is true, they teach us that God will act, not only as the guardian of the rights of man, but of the rights of God also. And is there any thing irrational, or unphilosophical, in supposing that the Most High will pay respect to his own glory ? If there be one only living and true God, is he bound to tolerate the worship of idols ? to disregard the conduct of his creatures ? or regard it only in case of injury to society ? Is it inconsistent with his goodness to appoint any positive test of obedience ? or to punish the violation of such injunctions, as well as of moral transgressions ? Or has he a right to avenge every kind of disobedience ? What punishment may God justly inflict ? And how may he execute his threatenings ? Must he always do it immediately by himself ? Or may he use instruments ? Is he at liberty in any case to suffer sinners to punish each other ? Or may he sometimes commission his voluntary servants to execute his vengeance ? Had he a right, when the iniquity of the Amalekites and the Amorites was full, to employ the Israelites in punishing them ? Or ought they to have been left to go on with all their impurities and idolatries, offering their own children to Moloch as long as they pleased ? Had God a right to destroy Sodom, &c. with all the inhabitants ? or to cut off the seven nations with pestilence, but not by the sword of Israel ? As long as evil exists in the world, the puny worm who censures the God of the Bible must censure the God of nature also, or plead that he is utterly unable to prevent it. But let us inquire,

FIRST, What is evidently intended by this declaration—*“The Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.”* ? Not that the divine mind is subject to any disquietude, or groundless

suspicion, or undue resentment. His happiness cannot be interrupted by any perturbation, and he is perfectly acquainted with the whole truth respecting every one, and his judgment is according to equity. But it means that the Most High God is ardently concerned for his own honor and glory, and requires a proper regard to the same object to be paid by others. That he is attentive to the conduct and disposition of all intelligent creatures, in every respect wherein they affect his declarative glory. His essential glory they cannot affect, but he is not therefore regardless of his declarative glory. God's greatness is no reason why he should disregard the disposition his creatures manifest towards him. God knows himself. He forms a just estimate of his own character and station. He cannot but treat himself according to the just idea he has of his own greatness and excellency. God cannot deny himself, nor can he be indifferent to the manner in which his creatures are affected towards him. He requires them to love him supremely, to place their happiness in the enjoyment of his favor, and to consider his glory as the chief end of their existence. He expects them to show their love by obedience, or intentional conformity to his will. He requires universal obedience, springing from supreme love. He demands also unfeigned gratitude for all his benefits; and the greater the benefits he bestows, the higher is the gratitude demanded. If other objects are preferred to him, he will undoubtedly resent it. If divine worship be formally paid to objects which have no claim to divinity, God will be highly displeased. Hence the strict prohibition of polytheism and idolatry: which crimes were greatly aggravated when committed by Israel, a people so highly favored by him; a people whom he had as it were espoused to himself, by entering into a national covenant. Hence idolatry in them was considered as spiritual adultery, and he threatened to judge them as women are judged that break the vows of wedlock. Nor are the obligations of Christians less binding, or their sins less aggravated. If they violate their professed attachment to God, they may expect the severest tokens of his holy displeasure. Though the Divine Being is not susceptible of painful agitation, yet his resentment against whatever tends to his dishonor will be found

more awful in its consequences than any effect of the strongest passions in the minds of created beings. Therefore passions are ascribed to him figuratively, (as bodily parts also are,) to impress our minds with the reality of the effects. The same word זֵל is used for zeal and jealousy; and surely if God be zealously concerned for his own glory, he must be jealous of whatever would clash or interfere therewith. His hatred of sin will be proportioned to his love to holiness, or true virtue. If the one be pleasing, the other must be displeasing; and God will show that it is so, by actions as well as by words.

SECONDLY: What are the impressions which this declaration ought to make on our minds? Certainly, we are bound to justify God in thus avowing his ardent concern for his own glory, honor, and authority. We ought to imitate his zeal, and to be very zealous for his honor, and jealous of whatever has a contrary tendency. Oh that we could say, with Elijah, (1 Kings xix. 10.) "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts." We should be concerned to keep ourselves from idols, and to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Beware lest you give any object whatever that place in your heart, which is due to God alone; even though it be not an object expressly forbidden, but one which you are allowed, or even obliged to regard with a subordinate affection. See to it, that neither your worldly possessions, nor your nearest relatives, your children, your friend that is as your own soul, your minister, or any other person or thing whatever, shall engross such a share in your affections, or such a measure of your regard or dependence, as God alone can justly demand. Let nothing rival him. Let nothing induce you to disregard or act inconsistently with your duty to him. Remember that he alone is God, and every thing beside is only that to you which he makes it. To idolize any blessing, or any instrument of good, is the way to lose it, or to have it embittered to you, and to lose all the good you might otherwise have derived from it. Set not up your own wisdom, righteousness, or will, in opposition to him; "for the Lord is a jealous God, and will not give his glory to another." The nearer the relation is, in which we stand to him, by profession or real participation of

the peculiar blessings he bestows on his people, the more circumspect should we be as to all our conduct, and the more watchful over our hearts. 1 Cor. x. 22. "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?"

II.

THE CHARACTER OF CALEB.

NUMB. xiv. 24.

But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully; him will I bring into the land, whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it.

BRETHREN, surely it is ground of lamentation, that while so small a part of the world is at present favoured with divine revelation, there should be so few who possess that advantage, who derive any great benefit from it, or find much pleasure in religion; and that even among those who profess to value the gospel, there are so few that appear fully to enjoy its consolations, and find their present happiness highly promoted, and their future felicity ascertained, by it.

I cannot account for the former case, but on the supposition, that human depravity is very great, and true religion very rare, divine influence being absolutely necessary for its production. And to account for the latter, I must suppose that the generality of those whom I would take for true Christians, live far below their privileges, and have but a small degree of true religion. I also fear, that they go the wrong way to work, in order to secure their own comfort; that they seek it too directly, and are, too often, rather concerned to know how little evidence will do to answer the purpose of ascertaining their safety, than to enquire what progress they may make in religion, and how they may bring most glory to God.

We find, indeed, that under the former dispensation, true religion was not only still rarer than at present in the world,

being almost confined to one nation, but was a rare thing in Israel. It was so in all their generations, and particularly in that which came out of Egypt with Moses. Though, if external means would have sufficed, never was any people favored with more extraordinary advantages. The judgments executed on the Egyptians, the providential appearances for themselves, the giving out of the law on Mount Sinai, the new institution of a pompous mode of worship, the guidance of a pillar of cloud and fire;—all these things would not avail to prevent the great majority of the people from murmuring, desponding, refusing to march on to Canaan, proposing a return to Egypt, and so provoking Jehovah to doom them to die in the wilderness. We trust this awful providence was sanctified to some of the parents, as well as to many of the children. And Moses and Aaron being involved in a like doom, though on a different ground, was an evidence that all do not die *in* sin, who die *for* sin. But it is an everlasting honor to Caleb and Joshua that their conduct was a contrast to that of their brethren, and that they were exempted, accordingly, from the general fate of their contemporaries. So it is here said, “But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully; him will I bring into the land, whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it.” I propose,

FIRST, To make a few observations on the import of the passage.

Many who have enjoyed the greatest external advantages, have failed of obtaining the benefit which seemed to be connected with them, for want of a correspondent frame of heart. We find, from Numb. i. 46. that there were 603,550 adult males, exclusive of the Levites, with many of whom God was not well pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness. 1 Cor. x. 5. And their destruction was altogether owing to “an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.” They had a prospect of entering Canaan when they left Egypt; but all fell short of it, except Caleb and Joshua. So, in the days of our Lord, how many saw his miracles, and heard him speak as never man spake, who yet believed not on him!

Persons may appear to follow the Lord for a time, who are not prepared to follow him fully. The Israelites had sung his praises at the Red Sea; but quickly forgot his works. Ps. xii. 13. Ps. lxxxviii. 8. 27. So many of the Jews in Christ's time, seemed to believe for a time; but were soon offended. John vi. 66.

A right spirit will appear to singular advantage in times of the greatest trial. So it was with Christ; so it was with Joseph, with Abraham, with Noah; and so it has been with many others in later periods of the church. Hence, Peter says, "The trial of faith is more precious than gold." And see James i. 3. 12.

There is no following the Lord fully, without another spirit than that of the generality of mankind, or even of the laxer sort of professors. He that is not willing to be singular for God, has no proper regard for him. He that would only be religious as far as it is fashionable, will be but little the better for his religion. Whereas, they who follow the Lord most fully, will surely have the richest enjoyment of the promised blessings. They will have the strongest assurance of the reality of religion, of its present advantages, and the largest anticipation of future bliss.

SECONDLY: Notice the difference between the spirit of Caleb, and the generality of the Israelites. "*He had another spirit with him.*"

Theirs was a *disobedient* spirit, though they had promised so fairly at Sinai. Deut. v. 27, 28.—But his was an *obedient* spirit. He approved cordially of the divine government, and the holy law of God. So must we, if we would follow the Lord. John xiv. 21. Theirs was a *rebellious* spirit. Isa. lxiii. 10.—But Caleb's was a spirit of *submission*; ready to suffer, as well as to perform the divine will. Theirs was a *distrustful, cowardly* spirit. But his was a *courageous, resolute* spirit. See Numb. xiii. 30. xiv. 9. Theirs was an *unbelieving* spirit. Numb. xiv. 11. "So we see they could not enter in because of unbelief." Heb. iii. 19. iv. 11.—But Caleb had a spirit of *faith*, depending on the divine all-sufficiency and veracity. Theirs was a *selfish* spirit. They cared only for their own ease, safety, and temporal enjoyment, and not

for the honor of the God of Israel.—But Caleb had a *disinterested, self-denying* spirit. He entered into God's views, he cared for God's glory. As Moses also did. Numb. xiv. 12. 19. And thus our Lord has taught us, "If any one will follow me, he must deny himself." Luke x. 23. Theirs was at best an *indolent, lukewarm* spirit.—But Caleb's was a spirit of *active zeal*. And indeed there is little to be done for God without such a spirit. Diligence is of importance in the things of this life, and so it certainly is in religion. Our Lord hates lukewarmness. He requires his people to be zealous; and he well deserves our utmost exertions.

THIRDLY: Consider how needful a like spirit is, that we may follow the Lord fully.—"*He hath followed me fully,*" saith the Lord, of Caleb; and the same phrase is used repeatedly in Joshua. Chap. xiv. 8, 9. 14.

We are called to an heavenly inheritance; but we must travel through a wilderness, and encounter hosts of foes; conquer the world, the devil, and the flesh; "fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life." But to this end, it is necessary that we should follow the Lord fully.

And to that purpose it is needful, that we should unite with him in our ends. He chose us that we might be holy. He predestinated us to be conformed to the image of his Son. Christ gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity; to bring us to God; to save from this present evil world. He meant to purify unto himself a peculiar people, called unto holiness, formed to show forth his praise. A right spirit will unite with God in these ends; and will consequently fall in with answerable means.

If we have a right spirit, we shall resign ourselves to the divine guidance; shall be willing to subject ourselves to the divine government; and resign ourselves to the disposal of God's providence. We should be willing that God should choose for us. We must rely entirely on the divine promises, and God's all-sufficiency and fidelity to execute them. "God has spoken; in his holiness, I will rejoice." We must seek the destruction of God's enemies, and long for every thing to be destroyed that is hostile to him. We must be universal

in our obedience. We must stand fast for God in times of the greatest defection. We must not follow the multitude, to do evil; but follow the Lord. We must keep our eye on one perfect example; and ask ourselves, how Christ would have acted in similar circumstances. We must never be satisfied till we obtain full possession of the promised rest—a state of perfection, including full conformity to God, and complete enjoyment of him.

III.

BALAAM'S WISH.

NUMB. xxiii. 10.

Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.

THE man who uttered this exclamation gave very awful proof of his being a bad man. He loved the wages of unrighteousness; he longed to obtain liberty to curse those whom he knew God had resolved to bless; and, what was the vilest of all, he taught Balak to lay a stumbling-block before Israel, that so he might partially prevail against them, by tempting them to displease their omnipotent protector.

Doubtless, he uttered the wish expressed in the text, under a strong, though a transient conviction of the happiness of the righteous. However, it was not granted; but he evidently died the death of the wicked. xxxi. 8.

Can there be any of my hearers so thoughtless and inconsiderate, as never to have felt a similar wish? Or would you dare to prefer an opposite request—‘Let me die the death of the *wicked*, and let my latter end be like *his*.’? Surely not. While we show, however, the reasonableness of this man’s language, let us remind you of the necessity of carrying your concern farther than his, and of being careful that you do not deceive yourselves as he did. Let us therefore inquire,

FIRST, What inducements may excite even a bad man to exclaim, “*Let me die the death of the righteous.*”

A bad man may be fully aware that he cannot always

live here, that there can be no long continuance on earth. He may sometimes have an alarming prospect of the near approach of death ; from the death of others, from threatening personal disease, or surprising accidents. A man

destitute of the grace of God may have a strong foreboding of a future state, and of the awful consequences which await the wicked in the other world. He may have a considerable

conviction that an awful discrimination will take place at death, that there will be a vast difference in a future state. He may be strongly persuaded of the happiness of the people of God ; may know that God has a peculiar people ; be constrained to admit that some of his acquaintance are of that number ; and be obliged to respect them, even though he loves not to be at present in any close connexion with them.

Yet the man who is thus constrained at times to exclaim, "*Let me die the death of the righteous,*" &c. may be more influenced by the fear of hell, than by any love to heaven : or he may be convinced of the future happiness of the righteous, without any distinct idea of the nature of it, or any true relish for that wherein it will chiefly consist. Though he may

chuse heaven in preference to hell, yet he would chuse earth in preference to heaven. He may not judge that to be the worst part of hell, which the Christian accounts so ; nor that the best idea of heaven which is so esteemed by the believer. And as to the present life, he may be still

more sensibly averse to the Christian's lot, who is so often exposed to contempt, persecution, and various trials. This leads us to inquire,

SECONDLY, What objections have many to live the life of the righteous, who, occasionally at least, wish to die their death ?

God has not exempted his people from sufferings and trials in the present life, and many of them have a large share of them. There are not many rich, great, or wise among them ; but God has chosen the greater part of his people from among the poor ; and if a few others should be connected with them, they must share in their reproach, and sympathize with them in their sufferings. Moses, for example. Oftentimes, and in many places, a connexion with God's people will expose a

man to great contempt, and even to violent persecution. Hence, many who sometimes wish to die their death, are often unwilling to be numbered with them in life. Many, who sometimes express such a wish, know nothing of the way in which they may be made righteous. They are neither sensible of their need of Christ's righteousness to insure their acceptance with God, nor of the renewing of the Holy Spirit to make them upright in heart. God's appointed way of salvation is too humiliating to suit the pride of the self-righteous; and the way of obedience is too strict to suit the friend of sin. Matt. v. 29, 30. And to become a stranger and pilgrim does not suit one who idolizes the world. Some, who have a superficial notion of salvation by grace, deceive themselves, by falsely inferring that it supercedes the need of holiness. Some, who have a blind notion of morality, deny their need of Christ, and satisfy themselves with external regularity, without any change of heart. Each of these classes separate what God has joined.

THIRDLY: What reason have we to fear that our wish of dying the death of the righteous will be of no avail, if we are averse to live their life?

Alas! though you are aware all is not right at present, yet you hope all may be well at last; but how futile are these hopes! What ground have you to expect they will ever be accomplished? Do you ever pray for it? Do you know how you can be put among their number? how you, a sinner, can be made righteous? Have you "fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you in the gospel."? Have you been born again? Are you a companion of those that fear God? Do you love the service of God now? If not, how will you bear heaven?

You hope, perhaps, for a change *before* death; but when will that more convenient season come? You have promised it yourself a long while. Shall you get all your companions to be of one mind, to turn with you? or some of your nearest connexions, at least? Will the world attract you *less* when you have got more of it? or will your heart become softer by continuing longer in sin? or shall you have more ground to hope that God will be gracious to you when you have offended him several years longer?

But will it not do, (you will perhaps say,) to return to God on a *death-bed*? Are you sure you shall have one? May you not die by an accident? be choaked, or drowned? or die by an apoplexy? or by palsy? or by a fever that will be attended with delirium? Shall you have no interruption from vain company, or injudicious friends? Shall you know how near you are to death? Will no physician, or other attendants, flatter you? or will you be sure not to flatter yourself? Will not carnal relations keep ministers from you? or charge them not to say much to you? May not even good people, through false tenderness and excess of charity, help to deceive you? Will it not be very difficult for any one then to be faithful? And though God will not, even at the eleventh hour, reject any one who may apply for mercy in the name of the Redeemer; yet is it certain that you will thus apply? or that the Holy Spirit will then effectually incline you to do what you never were willing to do before?

Oh my hearers! May God apply these thoughts to your hearts. To day hear his voice. Delays are criminal and dangerous. Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord. If a man be in Christ, and Christ in him, on him the second death hath no power. How happy are true believers! The death of the righteous is always safe; generally instructive and comfortable: and often triumphant.

IV.

THE CHRISTIAN'S RETROSPECT.

DEUT. viii. 2.

And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep his commandments, or no.

THE whole of that solemn discourse, which Moses addressed to the Israelites, just before his death, and their entrance into the promised land, not only was admirably calculated to edify them, but is replete with instruction suited

to profit every reader. Much of it is applicable to the case of those who live under the gospel dispensation, and would answer many valuable purposes for their admonition and direction; while its consolations are applicable, in the noblest sense, to all true believers. This verse especially will teach us in *general*, the duty of noticing the dispensations of providence, and the design of God in his dealings with the children of men. And it will apply to *true Christians* with peculiar propriety and emphasis, equal or superior to what attended the original address to Israel after the flesh.

FIRST: It becomes us, as rational creatures under a dispensation of mercy, gratefully to recollect the divine conduct towards us, all through the journey of life; and to consider the end of the dispensations of divine providence, and the improvement we ought to make of them.

Though we are not, like the Israelites, journeying from Egypt to Canaan, nor from one country to another; yet we are, as I may say, all in a travelling state; and really, though secretly, under the conduct of the Almighty, who hath led us and fed us, all our life long, though many of us know him not unto this day. We need, therefore, an instructive memento, like that which Moses gave Israel. Remember, who it was that called you out of non-existence; who gave you being at first; and preserved you unto this day. Remember, that the present is a transitory state, and that the journey of life will soon come to an end. With many, it is doubtless near its close already. And the youngest, or the healthiest, are as dependent on the will of God, for the continuance of life, as the eldest or sickliest. Remember the many mercies you have received from God all your life long. How distinguishing has his goodness been to you, above many others! How evidently have some of your temporal comforts been bestowed upon you, without being the fruit of your own contrivance, or efforts! And if, in other instances, you have been more active in promoting your own lawful temporal interest, what reason have you to acknowledge that the divine providence succeeded the attempt! Otherwise, all your efforts might have been rendered as unsuccessful as you have seen those of others to be,

whom you must allow have equalled you in ability and industry. Remember, at the same time, the evidence you have had, from your own experience, that this is a wilderness, through which you are passing. It is in vain to hope for happiness from the world. Earthly things are unsatisfying, and incapable of making any one truly blessed. In fact, those that idolize them most, find the greatest share of disappointment and vexation, and the most numerous snares attending them.

Remember, how evidently is suffering the consequence of sin! How often have you suffered as the immediate consequence of your own sins, or the sins of others!

Remember, what innumerable proofs you have given all through life, that the native disposition of your heart is enmity against God. He has tried you, with mercies and chastisements; but you have always formed some idol to prefer to him. You have utterly neglected his glory, and disregarded his will. Though God has been loading you with benefits, you have requited him evil for good. Some have gone on in open sin and irreligion. Some love the instruction which causeth to err from the words of knowledge. Some have neglected the means of grace, and the warnings of providence; have stifled convictions; have returned to God feignedly, and not with the whole heart; have violated his law, and slighted his gospel. And now, some are grown old in the service of sin. Others are giving the prime of their days to God's enemy. And will you still persist? still justify yourself before him? still flatter yourself you shall have peace, though you go on in the way of your own heart? Oh remember how near you are to your journey's end! And where is it likely to end?

SECONDLY: It is peculiarly the duty of Christians to notice the gracious dealings of God with their souls, and to consider the wise and kind designs he has in view in all his conduct toward them.

As the Lord, at your first birth, brought you out of non-existence into life; so at your new birth, he brought you out of that state which in its issue would have been worse than non-existence—into a new, spiritual, and divine life.

This was, indeed, like deliverance from Egyptian bondage ; when he delivered you from the curse and from the dominion of sin, and guided your feet into the way of peace and holiness.

Remember, the way of reconciliation was planned and discovered, by God himself, without your having any hand, either in contriving or effecting it. Remember, who induced you to comply with this way of salvation ; how ignorant of it, how averse to it, were you once. The very means of your being brought under the gospel, and induced to attend to it, were wonderful, especially in some cases. The subserviency of providence to the purposes of grace is admirable and endearing. The religious connexions into which you have been led, and which have conduced to your spiritual welfare, demand a grateful recollection. Remember, how innumerable have been your backslidings and transgressions, even since your return to God. But though you have multiplied offences, yet God has multiplied pardons. How patiently has he borne with all your ingratitude, perverseness, distrust, and murmurings ! How often has he restored your soul, healed your backslidings, and showed that he loved you freely ! Remember, how graciously has he assisted you in duty ; and how has he supported you under sufferings, by the consolations of the gospel ; and brought your trials so often to an unexpected and happy issue, beyond all that you could have imagined possible. Remember the manner in which God has defeated the plots of your adversaries to ensnare you, and to draw you into sin : this demands the warmest gratitude. Remember, how punctually he has fulfilled his promises hitherto ; and how amply and positively he has engaged for all that remains to be accomplished, in order to your final salvation.

From the whole retrospective view, what proof may you gather, that your salvation originated solely in grace ; and that grace must have all the praise. What evidence also, that God's love is everlasting and immutable ! He hateth putting away. At the same time, what proof that the Lord is an holy and jealous God, who will not connive at sin,

in his own people, nor let them follow after idols, without multiplying their sorrows. What tokens have you found of his power, all-sufficiency, wisdom, and faithfulness ! What cause to trust him all the rest of the way ! What reason have you for deep humility, and for continual watchfulness, prayerfulness, self-denial, and readiness to take up your cross, and follow Him, who can open fountains in the deserts, and feed with manna from on high ! What cause for repentance and godly sorrow ! And what ground for faith and holy joy !

Let the youngest recruit wait on the Lord and boast in him ; and let the oldest veteran confide no where else.

What reason have all true pilgrims to expect a happy end to their journey, in the Canaan above. The weakest soldier shall be more than a conqueror ; for the land is not to be got in possession by their own sword, neither is their own arm to save them. Much of the happiness of the future state will result from a perfect recollection of the events of time, and a clear discernment of God's end in them.

V.

THE DAYS OF HEAVEN UPON EARTH.

DEUT. xi. 21.

As the days of heaven upon the earth.

THIS remarkable expression is contained in an address which Moses made to the people of Israel, a little before his death ; wherein he most earnestly exhorted them to personal obedience, and also to the careful instruction of their children in true religion ; assuring them that this would be found the way to insure present prosperity to themselves, and to secure to their posterity the continued possession of the land promised to their fathers.

By comparing the whole of this verse with the 8th and 9th of the same chapter, it seems probable, that the phrase relates more directly to the *duration* of their prosperity in the earthly

Canaan, than to the *spiritual nature* of their enjoyments. However, as that temporal inheritance was, to true believers among them, a figure and a pledge of a better country, i. e. an heavenly; so we may very justly improve such a striking expression, by applying it to the exalted nature of those spiritual enjoyments, which, even in this life, are often connected with a close walk with God: and inquire,

FIRST, When may our days be said to be like the days of heaven upon earth?

When we enjoy much of a sense of the divine presence, and live in the contemplation of the glorious perfections of God.

“ Not all the harps above,
Can make a heavenly place,
If God his residence remove,
Or but conceal his face.”

The presence of God makes heaven, his absence hell. His presence makes heaven on earth. There they shall see his face; but if we have a glimpse of it here, we are happy.

“ Whom have I in heaven but thee,” &c. Then is

heaven on earth enjoyed, when we experience much of a delightful sense of the divine favor, and know we are accepted in the Beloved. So the Apostle describes true saints, as rejoicing in Christ Jesus, and putting no confidence in the flesh. And Peter represents them as rejoicing with joy unspeakable, and full of glory, in an unseen Saviour. The

Lord God and the Lamb are the light of heaven; and when Christ is enjoyed by us, heaven is enjoyed upon earth. A lively sense of the work of redemption contains in it much of the essence of heaven.

Heaven is then enjoyed upon earth, when the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit; and when our hearts are directed into love to him, as well as into the knowledge of his love to us. “ He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.”

1 John iv. 16. A spirit of gratitude and praise will do much towards making our days like the days of heaven upon earth. Much of heaven consists in praise. Rev. xiv. 2, 3. xv. 3. xix. 6. They praise God for every thing there. Much brotherly love, and enjoyment of the happiness of our fellow-saints, will make our days like heaven upon earth. No envy

is known there ; but the most cordial delight in each others felicity. The happiness of one does not in the least diminish the share of another, but adds to it most sensibly. Great victories over sin, and an intense love of purity, would make a heaven upon earth. There, God's name is in their foreheads. Here, true saints are changed into the likeness of their Lord, the more they contemplate his glory. Cheerful obedience to the commands of God, and delight in doing his will, would make our days like those of heaven upon earth. There his servants serve him without reluctance, impediment, or weariness. The more this is the case here, the more will earth resemble heaven. Frequent meditations on the heavenly state, strong confidence of soon entering upon it, and the sensible enjoyment of sweet foretastes of it, will make heaven seem to begin on earth.

There were three excellent men of the name of Thomas Shepherd, in New England : the grandfather, at Cambridge ; the father, at Charlestown, near Boston ; and the son, who succeeded him. The last died before he was twenty-seven, and said, the day before his death, to Dr. Cotton Mather : " My hopes are built on the free mercy of God, and the rich merit of Christ ; and I do believe that if I am taken out of the world, I shall only change my place ; I shall neither change my *company*, nor my *communion* ! "

Secondly : What course should we take, in order that our days may be like the days of heaven upon earth ?

We must be partakers of vital faith in Christ, and be renewed in the spirit of our minds. None ever came unto God but by him, who is the only Mediator, who made peace by the blood of his cross. Nor can any one walk with God, except he be agreed. Nor see God, except he be born again. We must make glorifying God our highest aim, and treat the enjoyment of God as the chief good. Our hearts must be weaned from earthly things ; we must be careful so to live in the world, as those who are not of the world ; and so to use it, as not abusing it. We must begin and end every day with God ; and " be in the fear of the Lord all the day long." Prov. xxiii. 17. Being continually watchful against whatever would tend to grieve the Holy Spirit, and cause him to with-

draw from us. Our speech should be always with grace, seasoned with salt ; (Col. iv. 6.) being careful that “ no corrupt communication proceed out of our mouths ; but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers : ” Eph. iv. 29. not always confining conversation to religious subjects, nor introducing them unseasonably and ostentatiously ; but watching for proper opportunities to give a proper turn to discourse ; as under the natural influence of an affecting sense of God’s universal providence, and of the vast importance of true religion, the evil of sin, the love of Christ, the worth of souls, and the reality of things unseen. This would as naturally occasion our interspersing profitable hints on religious topics, in our ordinary conversation, as it is natural to eat salt with every meal. Especially in our own families. We must be perpetually employed for God, and habitually resign our wills to the will of God. “ Filling up time with and for God,” said Brainerd, “ is the way to rise up and lie down in peace.” Thorough resignation of our wills to the will of God, is the way to constant gratification ; for, as God’s wise and holy purposes cannot be disappointed, they that view his hand in every thing that takes place, must always have cause for satisfaction. Even when they cannot see, at present, what end God has in view, they may well rest satisfied that he has an end which is infinitely worthy of himself, and shall not be frustrated. Mr. Sedgewick did not go too far, in saying, “ There is not any one creature, nor any one action of the creature, nor any one change about the creature, nor any one occurrence, nor any one issue and event of any one action, but is under the powerful hand and the watchful eye of divine providence.” *

Could this be realized at all times, we might enjoy constant peace. Still we should need daily the blood of sprinkling. If we would be thus happy, and enjoy heaven on earth, we must not be content with a bare name, or form, or mere hope of safety ; but follow hard after God.

* On *Providence*, p. 354.

VI.

THE LAST CURSE ON MOUNT EBAL.

[Preached at the Bristol Monthly Lecture, 1811.]

DEUT. xxvii. 26.

Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them; and all the people shall say, Amen.

WE began the monthly lectures of this year, with considering *the first promise*, or the first intimation of mercy given to man after the fall. We are to close them, by considering *the last curse*, pronounced upon Mount Ebal, to which the tribes of Israel were required to say Amen, as acknowledging its perfect equity, and justifying God's righteous displeasure with sin. It is indeed a very awful and alarming passage; but we must not on that account overlook it. God ordered it to be inserted in his word; and lest you should think it concerns the Jews only, the Apostle quotes it in his Epistle to the Galatians: (iii. 10.) and establishes its universal extent and permanent force. No doubt but it would include a wilful neglect of any position, precept, or prohibition, by those to whom it was given; but it appears chiefly to refer to the moral law, which is perpetually binding on all mankind. Hence it is, that all mankind are included under a charge of guilt, and sentence of condemnation; and that none can escape the curse of the law but those who are partakers of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. I would propose,

FIRST, Briefly to explain the import of this declaration.

We consider it as directly referring to the moral law. That law which is binding on all mankind, in every age, and every state; which is founded, not on sovereign appointment, but results from the very nature and perfections of God, and the necessary connexion between him and every intelligent creature. That law which is summed up in one word, LOVE: Gal. v. 14. which our Lord divides into two great commandments. Matt. xxii. 36—40. which is explained in the decalogue, and more fully expounded in the whole preceptive part of the word of God. It was the summary of the moral law, which God uttered with an audible voice, and wrote on two tables of stone,

which were deposited in the ark of the covenant. And these were doubtless written on the plaistered stones, which Israel was commanded to erect on Mount Ebal.

Before man was fallen, this law was written on his heart, so that he needed no verbal or written injunction, to love God and his neighbour. But it was a great advantage to Israel, to have so clear a summary of moral duty given : though the prohibitory form in which it was expressed indicated strongly that it was given to sinners, who had a propensity to act contrary to it.

We also should consider it as an advantage ; for sin is but little regarded where there is no law. “ By the law is the knowledge of sin.” “ I had not known sin, but by the law,” said Paul. If any therefore, who do not mean to encourage licentiousness, would set aside the use of that divine summary of duty, I must think that they act very unwisely.

The Apostle inserts the word *all* ; and though omitted in the printed copies of the Hebrew text, Dr. Kennicott found it in some of the most ancient manuscripts. And no doubt the thing required is constant, invariable, unfailing obedience.

There are some erroneous sentiments, much in vogue, which are too bad to be put into words ; and yet are very generally tacitly admitted. I have, for many years, considered this as one ; viz. ‘ That it is no man’s duty to be perfectly holy.’ Our text is irreconcilably opposed to such a notion. It declares that every thing short of perfect conformity to the divine law is sin, and exposes us to the righteous curse of the Most High.

This law is so extensive as to forbid all sin, even in the secret inclination of the heart, as well as in the outward conduct. And not only will the gross transgression expose to the curse ; but the defect of positive conformity to the rule of duty, whether external or internal ; the want of supreme love to God, or disinterested love to man.

Nor is any allowance made on account of that impotence which arises from, or rather consists in, disinclination. No degree of hatred to a neighbour will excuse injuring him, but rather will aggravate the injury. No degree of aversion to God, or enmity against his law, will excuse us for breaking it. No ; this is the very chief thing wherein human guilt

consists. It is an evil thing and bitter, to be destitute of all true regard to God ; that his fear is not in us ; that he knows we have not the love of God in us ; and that in our most plausible actions, it may be said, we do it not to him. Want of holy love is a cursed thing. Want of love to God is a cursed thing. Want of complacency in holiness, want of disinterested benevolence, is a cursed thing.

But who can describe the terrors of the curse ! To be separated from God and holy beings ; separated to evil ; condemned already ; having nothing before us but a fearful looking for of judgment ; for wrath to come on us to the uttermost, and still more wrath to come ; to have the society of none but evil beings, and no semblance of love found among them ; to be cast into outer darkness, "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched," and no hope of a release, or end of misery ! Yet these are the wages of sin ; and all the people were enjoined to say, Amen.

But how could this be ? Must they not invoke destruction on themselves, and all the world of mankind ? No—But they must justify God, and condemn themselves as worthy of death. And they must learn the need of infinite wisdom, love, and power, to redeem them from this most righteous curse. And thus the law was their schoolmaster, to show the need of a Mediator ; and we must go to the same school, or we shall see no need of the death of Christ, to redeem us from the curse of the law.

If we did not truly deserve death ourselves, the death of Christ must be the most shocking event in the world. But if we really deserved the curse, then our redemption from it is the greatest of all the works of God. We proceed therefore,

SECONDLY, To consider more fully the improvement we ought to make of it.

First : We here see the purity of Jehovah, or his fervent love of order.—He is the moral Governor of the universe, who sits on the throne that is high and lifted up, judging right. And we may here behold how much he loves what is right, and hates what is wrong. How he is concerned to prevent disorder, and discountenance sin, throughout his extensive empire.

Secondly : Behold his benevolence also, and his attention to human happiness.—He denounces a curse against every one who shall neglect relative duties to you ; who shall deprive you of your property ; take advantage of your ignorance or helplessness ; pollute your kindred ; hurt your person ; or be accessary, on any account, to another's injuring you. Is not this an evidence of God's kindness ? Is not this law an expression of benevolence ?

Yes ; but he forbids *you* the same. True ! and is he the less good to you, because he cares for your neighbour also ? and for all mankind ? Would you have one law to prohibit Algerines from injuring Europeans ; and another to permit Europeans to enslave Africans ?

Thirdly : Learn, at the same time, God's zeal for his own glory.—The great part of the preceding denunciations relate to the second table of the law ; yet he began with sins against the first. (Ver. 15.) He will not neglect his own rights. Nor does that prohibition relate to gross idolatry alone : it extends to mental idolatry ; or the preference of any thing which is not God, to him who by nature is the only true God. And is it not proper that the moral Governor of the universe should assert the rights of the Supreme Being, as well as those of created beings.

Fourthly : We infer the dreadful degree of human depravity.—This law was not made for a righteous man. A law delivered with thunders, and lightnings, and earthquakes, and then committed to writing in a prohibitory form, with numerous curses annexed, must surely have been promulgated to sinners. God had occasion to prohibit some sins which will hardly bear to be named. (20—23.) And these prohibitions, it seems, were needful for the most enlightened people of antiquity ! They would otherwise have been named without cause. They had probably been common among the Canaanites, whom God drove out of the land.

Fifthly : We may here behold the glory of vindictive justice, and learn the awful consequences of sin.—God's hatred of sin is in proportion to his love to himself, and his regard to the highest good of the created system. If He, who alone is capable of holding the reins of government, were indifferent to the moral conduct of his creatures, existence

would be a dreadful evil. How awful is the vengeance of the Most High ! Yet how justly due to sin ! How terrible ! And yet how righteous ! All should say, Amen !

1. We learn from these transactions on Mount Ebal, The utter impossibility of acceptance with God on the footing of personal obedience.—This is Paul's inference. See Gal. iii. 10. It is impossible that the law should justify its transgressor. It cannot accept the obedience of a sinner. Nothing less than perfect righteousness can entitle a man to eternal life. Therefore,

2. We infer, the necessity of a Redeemer to deliver from the curse of the broken law.—So Paul, Gal. iii. 13. Nor could this have been done but by one of infinite dignity, and infinite compassion ; whose obedience unto death could magnify the law, and satisfy the justice of God ; answering fully by his sufferings, every end that should otherwise have been answered by ours.

3. We fairly deduce from hence, the infinite obligations of believers to the Saviour.—Surely they are his property, and not their own ; are bound to love him, and live to him ; are “not without law unto God, but under the law unto Christ.” They are redeemed from the curse, but redeemed from all iniquity also ; and bound by stronger ties than ever, to obedience.

4. Learn in what way believers should show their gratitude.—Sanctified but in part, yet conscious that sinless conformity to the divine will is justly due, we may expect to find them humbled under a sense of infinite blame. Theirs must be a life of self-loathing, justifying God, hungering and thirsting after righteousness ; watching, praying, wrestling, fighting against sin, must be the life of the Christian. While daily experience increases his dependence on free grace ; and at last he dies “looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

5. We must infer the certain and awful ruin of them that abide under the curse.—If Christ be rejected, there remains no more sacrifice for sin. They who will not see the evil of sin in his sufferings, must feel it in their own. Deut. vii. 10. “He repayeth them that hate him.” xxxii. 41. “If I whet my glittering sword,” &c. xxix. 19, 20. “The Lord will not

spare him," &c. Ezek. xxii. 14. "Can thy heart endure, or thy hands be strong," &c.

6. May I take the liberty to add, that to me it appears of great importance, that ministers should preach the law in subserviency to the gospel?—I feel no disposition to dictate to my brethren. I would neither make a man an offender for a word, nor for the want of a word; or oblige others to weigh out divine truth by my scales, or to administer it exactly in my proportion. But I should feel very guilty myself, if I omitted these subjects; and had rather undergo the reproach of being a legal preacher from men, than the reproach of my own conscience for omitting them.

I am fully persuaded, That as far as means are concerned, there is nothing so well adapted to kill a self-righteous spirit, as a thorough conviction of the extent, spirituality, perfection, and immutability of the divine law. I can put no other sense on the words of the Apostle: "I, through the law, am dead to the law." A conviction of its spirituality killed all illegal hope in him; and a conviction of its equity killed all desire of justifying himself. If we could hurry men into a superficial assent to salvation by grace, while unconvinced of the justice of God in the condemnation of sinners, they would easily give it up, or else abuse it. But did not Paul complain of some who desired to be teachers of the law? Yes, of those who understood neither what they said, nor whereof they affirmed; "but we know, (said he,) that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully." Now, I conceive, that we make a legitimate use of the law, when we endeavour thereby to lead men into the knowledge of sin, and of the absolute need of a Saviour and a Sanctifier; and also when we use it to teach believers how to depart from iniquity, and adorn the gospel.

The generality of those who have encouraged a self-righteous spirit, have either laid a stress on mere forms and ceremonies, or at least have taught a very partial morality; talking superficially of justice and mercy, but omitting walking humbly with God. "I am afraid of you, (said Paul,) lest I have bestowed on you labour in vain." Why so? Because you listen to preachers who insist on human

obligation, and the perfection of the divine law? who say it is a great sin not to love God supremely, and your neighbour as yourself? Nay—But “ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.” Ye are entangled with the yoke of bondage to those ceremonies, which, to the ancient Jewish believers, were figures of good things to come; the substance of which is in Christ, but which the unbelieving Jews abused, by putting the type in the room of the antitype.

VII.

IMPLICIT SUBMISSION TO THE DIVINE WILL.

1 SAM. iii. 16.

It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.

THE person who first used this expression was indeed as defective a character as most of the true saints, whose lives are recorded in sacred history; and yet there are some striking evidences of his disinterested affection to God and his cause. He used the language of the text, when a most awful reproof was sent him, by the mouth of a child, who had a great respect and affection for him, and was used to wait upon him. It discovers singular meekness, humility, and submission; and shows that he was truly pious and penitent, though he had not, now in his infirm age, sufficient courage, vigour, or authority, to call his sons to account. He had neglected exerting himself properly before, and been criminally mild in his treatment of these wicked men, who now would set him at defiance. But if a sense of the divine and righteous sovereignty, wisdom, and goodness, could thus constrain him, to submit implicitly to the will of God, conscious that he could do nothing wrong; how much more ought it to reconcile us to those dispensations of providence, which, while they thwart our natural inclinations, are really promoting our present and future happiness. Let us then notice,

FIRST, The considerations on which our implicit submission should be grounded.—“*It is Jehovah.*”

His infinite dignity and supreme dominion render it reasonable.—Not merely yielding to necessity, as knowing resistance would be unavailing; but realizing the supreme dominion of one worthy to possess it. The throne is his by right. His infinite understanding prohibits all suspicion of mistake. His infinite power places him out of the reach of all temptation. He has nothing to fear, nothing to gain. What then should influence him to act contrary to the nature and fitness of things, with which he must be infinitely well acquainted? He must know himself, and know his own creatures. And there is no other being.

The entire dependence of all creatures upon God.—They live, and are moved in him; they had their being, and every power and faculty from him; they possess nothing but what he has given them; and they continue to possess it by his will. The more they have, the more do they depend upon him for. A stone, for existence; a tree, for vegetable life; a brute, for animal life; man, for rational life; angels, for superior power. Gabriel has as much more dependence on God than an oyster, as he has more being.

Consider the just responsibility of creatures.—Absolute dependence cannot destroy responsibility, but is the very foundation of it. They to whom God has given all, owe their all to him; and if they have any capacity to know him, understand his will, enjoy him, and intentionally promote his glory, they must be bound to do so. He cannot deny himself, nor give intelligent creatures leave to do so with impunity. Nor is he indifferent to their conduct towards each other. Were he indifferent to their conduct, he must be indifferent to their happiness: but he is not regardless of either. ii. 30.

The moral excellence of Jehovah's character shows this.—God is love, glorious in holiness, venerable in praises. He duly appreciates both his own glory, and the happiness of his creatures; has an infinite love to all that is right, and a proportionable hatred of sin; cannot behold iniquity with a favorable eye; will not suffer the obedient to be finally unhappy, nor the wicked finally to prosper. He can indeed pardon sin, but it shall be only in a way worthy of himself: so as to express his utter abhorrence of it, while he

forgives it. And he will subdue, as well as pardon, the iniquities of all whom he saves. He will also make it apparent that he is self-moved in the exercise of his mercy; and not induced to bestow salvation on those whom his law had condemned, from regard to any good quality, or good deed of theirs.

Consider moreover, the universal extent of his providence.—To all his creatures, in all places of his dominion; to all mankind, and all their concerns; all the events of life, the issues of death, the eternal states of man. He will decide on every character, and fix every one's final destiny.

Consider the wise reasons of his conduct.—These may not always be obvious to us, especially if we are destitute of a right spirit. But in numberless instances, his infinite wisdom has been displayed; he has often overruled the most mysterious events for wise purposes; and he deserves that we should trust him implicitly, though he gives us no account of his matters. At last, the wisdom of his plans shall fully appear to all his friends.

Consider the obligations we are under to sovereign mercy, if we have been brought into a state of reconciliation to God.—Has he chosen us, called us, forgiven us, accepted us, preserved us, enabled us to hold on thus far? Has he chastened us as a man chastens a beloved child, far less than we deserve, and with a direct view to our profit? Oh, how should this affect us! Let us notice,

SECONDLY, The extent to which submission should be carried.—Where will you bound it? Should we not in every case say, "*Let him do what seemeth good in his sight.*"?

He is worthy that we should justify him, against all his final enemies.—This must not be abused to the neglect of present duty, nor to prevent a deep and earnest concern for the salvation of others, especially those whom God has committed to our care. If God's decrees do not lessen your desire to have them rich, shall they lessen your anxiety to have them saved? But still the honor of God, and the will of God, when fully made known, require a preference to every other consideration. Lev. x. 3.

He is worthy that we should deeply humble ourselves before him, under personal rebukes.—Eli had been very culpable himself, and penitence strengthened his submission.

He is worthy that we should trust him implicitly, even when we cannot see the reasons of his conduct.—These were more obvious in the death of Eli's sons, than in suffering the ark to be taken.

He is worthy that we should acquiesce in his will, as soon it is made known to us.—We do not expect to be informed of this by a particular revelation, as Eli was. But when known by the event, as in the case of David's child. 2 Sam. xii. 16. 29.

He is worthy we should resign ourselves, and all we have, to his disposal.—“He performeth the thing appointed for me, and many such things are with him.” “My times are in thy hand.” And where could we wish them better? Would you rather it should be according to your own mind? Job xxxiv. 33. Do you know best what is good for you? “Be anxious for nothing,” &c.

He is worthy we should give up whatever he requires us to resign.—“The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away,” &c. We have no claim upon him for our comforts, so long as they remain with us; and surely he has a right to recal them: especially to take his own children to eternal rest. He is the best judge when their education is finished, whom he is training up for glory. He knows when they whom he makes most useful, have done all that he has allotted them. He will not call them hence by mistake, while he has need of them here. He does not think it best, to let all wear out by degrees, and outlive their usefulness, till their very friends wish them out of the way. We may easily guess at some reasons why it is best all should be apparently uncertain; that we may see the necessity of being always ready, and not pursue earthly things too eagerly. Whilst we remember, that the Lord is infinitely worthy that we should devote ourselves to him, without any reserve; and always act as conscious that we are not our own, but his, and that whatever we call ours, is strictly the Lord's.

He is worthy that we should prefer his glory, and the advancement of his kingdom in the world, and in our own hearts, to every thing else ; and be sincerely willing that he should use his own way to accomplish these important objects.

Ah ! if we did but thoroughly believe the very first principles of revealed religion, and act indeed under their influence, how reasonable and easy would the hardest duties appear ! Let us treat God as God ; and what can disconcert us, or make us unhappy !

VIII.

SIN CONSIDERED AS DESPISING GOD.

2 SAM. xii. 10.

“Thou hast despised me.”

“Woe unto the world, because of offences,” said our blessed Lord : “it must needs be that offences come, but woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh.” Even if he be found a true believer, and should he be saved at last, he shall meet with severe correction : “God will visit his transgressions with the rod, and his iniquity with stripes ; but his loving kindness he will not utterly take from him, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail.” David is a striking proof of this. And though his history has been abused by some wanton professors, and has been the occasion of many infidels reviling revelation ; yet whoever attends impartially to the *whole* history, will see that neither the one, nor the other, have any just ground for the inferences they so eagerly draw from it.

While his awful fall shows us the depravity of the heart, and the deceitfulness of sin ; God’s reproof, and his providential correction, even after David’s sincere repentance, fully displays the purity of the divine nature, and the abhorrence with which he views sin, wheresoever he sees it.

This one expression, used by God himself, in the message which he sent to David, by Nathan the prophet, is pecu-

liarly striking and emphatic—" *Because thou hast despised me!*" I would,

FIRST, Attend to some introductory remarks on the import of this phrase.

The sins of believers have as much intrinsic evil as the sins of others: they equally tend to God's dishonor. They are not, indeed, committed with so full an inclination of will, nor without opposition and inward struggles. Nor do they actually bring them into eternal condemnation. But, though not committed without opposition, yet their prevailing against that opposition is an evidence of the malignant power of sin. And though they do not eventually bring them

to hell, yet they really deserve eternal banishment from God. And though pardoned, yet it is in such a way

as to demonstrate their evil more than personal punishment. Though the sins of believers do not over-

throw their salvation, yet they darken their evidence of interest in it, and rob them of its inestimable joys. Nor can these be regained till the backslider is brought to true repentance. All obligations considered, the sins of

believers are attended with greater aggravations than those of others, and are therefore most odious and abominable. Consequently, the very love of God to his people,

will induce him to embitter sin to them; and in case of open scandal, he will probably show this to others. Let me,

SECONDLY, Insist on the principal idea in the text; viz. That sin, especially in believers, is a despising of God.

It is a despising of those excellences which are peculiar to the Supreme Being. A practical denial of his infinite

loveliness and glory. An affront offered to all his attributes separately considered. To his omnipresence and omniscience. David's attempt to hide it from man, only led him on to still greater evils. xi. 8. xiii. 15. To his purity, holiness, justice, and truth. To his omnipotence, or power to recompense, &c. A denial or contempt of his supreme

authority and dominion. A denial of his rightful propriety in us. A denial of the easiness and pleasantness

of his service. A denial of his all-sufficiency to make

us happy. It is acting such a part as would be ac-

counted a sign of contempt, if any fellow-creature, to whom are we stood related, or were indebted, should be treated by us in like manner. For example: If a man were our superior, our king, or only our master: if he were our benefactor, father, or friend: would not any one take it as an affront, an insult, or a mark of contempt? If we slighted his just authority, or contradicted his express will. If we treated him as a hard master; acting as though we must leave his family, or violate his laws, to be happy. If we should harbour his worst enemies, and show that we preferred them before him. If we should encourage them that hated him, to reproach him; or should countenance their slanders against him. If we should forsake and shun his company. If we should undervalue his richest favors. If we should requite him evil for good. Deut. xxxii. 6. If we should act contrary to the best advice he had given us. If we should attempt to frustrate his favorite schemes for our good, which he had been at great pains and expense to accomplish: how ill would those things be taken? And is not sin, a despising Christ, on whom sin was punished?

THIRDLY: Make application of it to ourselves.

O believers! examine yourselves. Have you not all been guilty, in some degree, of thus *despising* your Lord? Think of the aggravations of your sins. What are you? Who is he?

“THOU hast despised ME.”

Think of

Your meanness,	} and {	His majesty;
Your obligations,		His beneficence;
Your dependance,		His propriety;
Whence are you delivered,		How redeemed by him;
Whither are you going,		How exalted.

Και συ τεκνον; said Cæsar to Brutus.

Thou David! taken from the sheepcote, delivered from the lion—the bear—Goliath—Saul—and raised to the throne of Israel! Thou believer! delivered from the lowest hell, and adopted into the family of heaven! buried with Christ in baptism; fed at the Lord's table!

Think of his intrinsic glory, and reflect on the relations he condescends to sustain. The self-existent, eternal Jehovah, the God of the whole earth, the God of the armies of heaven, adored by angels, before whom devils tremble. Your Redeemer, your father, your friend, your portion, your God.

Oh! lament and mourn, and be ashamed: be filled with self-contempt, and self-abhorrence. 'But we have not sinned like David.' But have you never despised, or slighted the Lord? nor neglected his glory? What a Bochim would this assembly be, if we realized the greatness of our obligations, and the inadequacy of our returns! Oh watch against sin and temptation. Watch and pray incessantly. Shall we despise the Lord? Seek fresh supplies of grace. Be reconciled to the correcting rod of your Father; but never be reconciled to sin, nor to unfruitfulness. Labour henceforth to honor him, whom you have too often dishonored. "Herein is my Father glorified," &c. Admire, and adore divine patience, pardoning mercy, and everlasting love.

How should they take this reproof to themselves, whose backslidings have been visible, and have given open offence to their brethren, and caused the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme! Have none done this more privately, though known only to unconverted relatives, or dependents?

Doubtless, the irreligious and unconverted are liable to the same charge of despising the Lord, and the commandment of the Lord, and that habitually; and awful will be the consequence.

IX.

THE OFFICE AND POWER OF CONSCIENCE.

1 KINGS. ii. 44.

The king said, moreover, to Shemei, Thou knowest all that wickedness which thine heart is privy to, that thou didst to David my father: therefore the Lord shall return thy wickedness upon thine own head.

SUCH was the language of Solomon, to Shemei the Benjamite, who abused David in the day of his calamity, and cursed him, &c. 2 Sam. xvi.

The badness of wicked men seldom shows itself more openly, than on occasion of the falls of good men. "They eat up the sin of my people as they eat up bread." It is quite a gratification to them, though their malice often makes them overshoot their mark, and charge the people of God wrongfully, even when there is too much room for just censure. They cannot confine their reproach as to what is really amiss. David, however, would not avenge himself, either in the day of his distress, nor yet when he was restored to his kingdom. 2 Sam. xix. 22. But when he was called to resign his throne to his son, who was young and tender, prudence, and love to his country, urged him to give Solomon a caution respecting men who were likely to excite disaffection to his government, and endanger the peace of the state. Solomon made a very fair proposal to Shimei, who gave his promise, and pledged his oath to stand to it; but ere long violated both, and brought ruin on his own head.

This striking expression will naturally lead our meditations to consider,

FIRST, The office and power of conscience.

The expression in the text accords with a remark of Bernard's. Conscience is "*Cordis scientia, cor enim et se novit, et multa alia; cum se novit appellatur conscientia; cum præter se alia, nominatur scientia.*" Solomon appeals here to Shimei's conscience.

The Apostle speaks (Tit. i. 15.) of sinners having their mind and conscience defiled; and doubtless the power of conscience is greatly impaired by sin. But, though bad men have no sense of the primary beauty of holiness, yet there is a secondary sort of beauty in true rectitude, to which they cannot be altogether insensible. They must see an inconsistency between their treatment of others, and the treatment they could wish to receive. They must admit a sort of proportion between actions and their rewards. The worst of liars would wish others to tell him the truth. No monster of cruelty would like to be treated cruelly himself. So the conscience of Adonibezek testified God's justice. Judg. i. 7. The most dishonest would not be willing to be cheated. No shameful debauchee would like another profligate to deal with his

family, as he would deal with his neighbour's. Every man can see the evil of ingratitude towards himself, in one whom he has greatly befriended. No man thinks the second great commandment too strict, as the rule of the conduct of others with respect to him. Nor can any man, who allows the existence of a first cause, use his reason at all, and yet utterly deny his obligations to his Maker and Benefactor.

Yet, in the time of health and prosperity, men frequently contrive to still the voice of conscience, though actually chargeable with atrocious crimes. But when calamity overtakes them, it often alters the case. So Joseph's brethren, after more than twenty years. Gen. xlii. 21. "We are verily guilty concerning our brother."

And God, without the aid of any external calamity, can easily fasten a sense of guilt on the conscience. If he does not do it before, he may do it on a dying-bed; and to such a degree that the pains of hell shall sieze the soul, even before it leaves the body.

And assuredly, if you die in your sins, this will prove at last, that worm which shall never die. In the world of woe, conscience will never cease upbraiding the ungodly; they will have no respite from its clamours, nor will they be able to stifle or to disregard it. Besides, as the name itself seems to import, others will unite in its verdict. Others along *with it*, know what it testifies to be true. Men know a great deal. Evil spirits, with whom sinners must spend a sad eternity, know a great deal more. He who once helped you to palliate your sins, will then unmercifully aggravate them. Holy angels have also been invisible witnesses to much of your wickedness, which you concealed from human eyes. And God himself saw it all: not only the most secret acts, but the most secret thoughts of your heart; secret motives, secret mixtures, secret defects. He can, in this life, rouse conscience to set all your sins before you, with all their aggravations; and he will assuredly do so in a future state, if you die impenitent and unpardoned. One whose memory never fails, will refresh yours, and call all your sins to your remembrance then; and you will have no possible means to prevent reflection,

or to divert your mind from the melancholy subject. Let us then consider,

SECONDLY, The improvement we ought to make of the subject.

Let me earnestly beseech and charge my dear hearers, to treat conscience, not as an enemy, but as a friend. "He that will not hearken to the warnings of conscience here, must feel the woundings of conscience hereafter." "It is a most desirable thing, (said Bernard,) to feel the worm of conscience, while it is possible for its wounds to be healed. Let it bite now, that it may by degrees give over biting at all." It is a sad thing to imprison it now, that it may prey on your vitals for ever, in that world where their worm dieth not, nor shall the fire be quenched. Pray that God would enlighten conscience thoroughly, and make it faithful, that it may tell you of every thing that is contrary to duty, whether towards God or man. Employ it as the candle of the Lord, to ransack all the inmost recesses of the soul, and detect every evil thing.

If conscience were well instructed, and faithful, it would tell every man of many more evils than are known to his fellow-men. Yet the hearts of some are so hardened, through the deceitfulness of sin, that they make light of crimes which are generally known and condemned by men, if no penalty or loss follows. And sometimes men pride themselves in concealing from their fellow creatures, the sins which they secretly indulge. But "thou knowest all the wickedness to which thine heart is privy;" and what is now recollected without concern, or even with inward glee, will be remembered hereafter with excruciating remorse.

Some sins, which are abominable in the sight of God, may not be very odious in the account of men: yea, it is possible, some may even be applauded and admired. But all will be bitterness in the end, unless they are sincerely repented of, forsaken, and mortified; as well as truly pardoned, through the sacrifice of Christ.

Were it not for his gospel, indeed, you might allege, that to employ conscience to detect every evil of your heart and your life, would be only to torment yourself before the time.

For nothing can be more burdensome, nothing more miserable, than a conscience terrified by the law of God, and a view of the evil of sin. One sin, viewed in a just light, would be enough to destroy all hope of acceptance with God, on the ground of your own righteousness. But if innumerable iniquities stare you in the face, they should only hasten your flight to the hope set before you in the gospel; and enhance your sense of obligation to Him who died, “the just for the unjust;” and cause you more exclusively to make mention of his righteousness, as the ground of your justification; and excite you with equal earnestness to pray for internal sanctification, and constant aid in mortifying every sin, and attending to every duty.

Go home, then, my dear friends, and call conscience to an account, or suffer it to call you to account, as in the presence of the all-seeing God.

Can you recollect no past evils, to which others could testify, as well as conscience? Many doubtless were living, who could remember Shimei’s wickedness to David.

Can you recollect no evils, to which conscience can testify, though hardly any mortal was acquainted with them? You very carefully concealed them from men, from your parents, &c. though not from your Judge.

Let conscience tell you of the evils you planned and premeditated, though providence prevented you from perpetrating them.

Has not your heart “*been privy*” to vile affections, to bitter passions, to unjust designs, to secret pride, to malice, to revenge, and covetousness? to atheistic, ungodly thoughts? to murmuring, repining, and discontent? Will it charge none with hypocrisy, with being destitute of any regard to God’s glory, with enmity against his law, with disaffection to his gospel, with neglect of Christ?

Verily, the Lord will return all your wickedness on your own head, unless you flee to him, who bore his people’s sins, in his own body on the tree, and made reconciliation for transgressors.

X.

THE HISTORY OF JEROBOAM AND THE TWO PROPHETS.

I KINGS xiii.

And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the Lord unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense, &c.

WHATSOEVER things were written aforetime, were written for our instruction and admonition. The history of the sacred scriptures abundantly illustrates the doctrines of scripture, and especially the doctrine of human depravity, and the doctrine of divine providence. The whole history of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is of this kind. And the remarkable events contained in this chapter, are well worthy of our attention. I propose,

FIRST, To make a few remarks on the account of Jeroboam, the first king of the ten tribes, who cast off their allegiance to the house of David.

His history, when we consider his circumstances and conduct, is a striking instance of human depravity. The God of Israel, by the mouth of his servant Ahijah, had foretold his unexpected exaltation, assigning Solomon's idolatry as the cause of the divine displeasure, and promising Jeroboam a sure house, if he continued obedient to him. xi. 38. And this prediction was punctually fulfilled. How ungrateful, then, was the conduct of Jeroboam! What an evil heart of unbelief did he discover, that he could not trust him to preserve the throne to him, who had thus raised him to it. xii. 26, &c. What a stupid kind of idolatry did he introduce; which probably he learnt in Egypt; but which he knew had been highly displeasing to God, when the Israelites compelled Aaron to make a calf at Horeb, and when they were so severely punished. What daring presumption did he discover! And how great was his hardness of heart, that he should persist in his evil courses, and not be brought to repentance by solemn warnings, judgment, nor mercy: nor by subsequent events narrated in this chapter;

nor by the death of his pious son. What long continued mischief may one man do, for 350 years ; for it continued nearly 100 years after the captivity of Israel.

Consider the conduct of God in this case. We may see his wisdom, in planning circumstances to try the children of men. We see his sovereign dominion, over-ruling even the worst of men to subserve his purposes. This is, indeed, no excuse for them, whose end differs widely from his. So it was with Jacob, Jehu, the Assyrian, Judas, &c. We see his perfect knowledge, and the immutability of his counsel. This was above 350 years before Josiah fulfilled it. xxiii. 16. We see his patience and forbearance, which yet shall not be insulted and abused with impunity. We see his absolute power over his enemies ; and his retributive justice. xiv. 10.

SECONDLY : Consider the case of the man of God.

He appears to have been truly a good man, one who was properly stiled, " O man of God." Consider his boldness, his forgiveness, his firmness at first.

Yet surely it was not through mere imposition and inadvertence, that he was deceived. The first charge he had received from God was too clear and express. Why did not he himself immediately lift up his heart, and ask counsel ? Probably he was ready to repine, and think the restriction hard. He somewhat changes his tone. Ver. 8. 16. I may not—cannot.

Hence we learn, They who have resisted a greater temptation, may afterwards, if they let down their watch, be overcome by a less. The persuasions of false-hearted professors, are often more dangerous than those of the openly ungodly. Learn the need of constant faith, self-denial, watchfulness, and strict attention to the divine word. God may punish his own people more severely in this life, than the ungodly and hypocrites. We proceed,

THIRDLY, To notice the case of the lying prophet of Bethel.—I think he was a bad man.

His remaining at Bethel was probably owing to indifference to the worship of Jehovah. His sons seem to have gone to attend the idol worship ; nor had he warned them against it.

In all probability, the love of the world was his governing principle.

In following the man of God, and seducing him to violate the injunctions given him, it is likely he was influenced by worse motives than respect, kindness, or curiosity. He might not foresee the fatal consequences; but at least he wished to be owned by this man of God, as a brother prophet.

He might hope to share in the respect that the miracles wrought, in first withering and then healing Jeroboam's arm, and rending the altar, would procure for the prophet of Jehovah.

If Jeroboam should reform, he would like the honor of becoming his counsellor and instructor.

His mind might be hurt with the superior honor put on a man sent from a distance. So Zedekiah, to Micaiah. xxii. 24.

See, however, how God compelled him to denounce the death of the man he had deceived.—O thou old sinner! if God so punish his servant for believing thy lie, will he let thee go unpunished for telling it? Yes, in this life he may; but if he should, it may be the worse for thee in another world.

As to his desiring to be buried with him, his object was, that he might be thought the better of; and that his bones might lie undisturbed; but of what avail was that? This issued in recording his treachery.

But God intended to make these facts more known, and the subsequent events also the more memorable. Rightly viewed, the prophet's death was a confirmation of his doctrine and his predictions.

If God was so strict with his messenger, how would he fulfil his word to his enemy? Yet it is not unlikely, that Jeroboam hardened himself by it.

In righteous judgment, God suffers bad men to meet with events, which they can distort or misrepresent, to quiet their conscience, after they have been made uneasy.

However, it was over-ruled to keep a memorial of these things near the spot.

Let us all learn, To beware of sin and disobedience, even in the smallest matters.

If we are God's people, it will be rebuked and embittered here.

If not, it will

be our ruin at last. Let none interpret forbearance as connivance, nor as an evidence of final impunity. Both the king and the old prophet were guilty, it is probable, of this folly. Beware especially of such professors, as would tempt you to make light of duty, or of sin.

XI.

THE CHARACTER OF ABIJAH.

1 KINGS xiv. 13.

And all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him; for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave; because in him there is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel, in the house of Jeroboam.

EITHER the people of Israel must be supposed to have been very different from all other people on the face of the earth; or, if their history may be considered as a sample of human nature, and is indeed recorded for that very purpose, we must admit that it abundantly proves and illustrates the doctrine of human depravity.

In that view, the history of Jeroboam, and the apostasy into which he led the ten tribes, is peculiarly deserving our attention. All the descendents of Noah had forsaken the true God; and his worship would have been totally banished from the globe, had he not selected one nation for himself: and how prone they were to backslide, their whole history shows; and especially the open revolt of the kingdom of Israel. Even in Judah, Isaiah owned, Chap. i. 9. Jeroboam himself had been previously apprized, by the prophet Abijah, of his exaltation to the throne, and at the same time assured, that the idolatrous compliances into which Solomon had been seduced by his foreign wives, were the cause of provoking the Lord to take away ten tribes from under the dominion of his family. xi. 33. Yet neither the surprising accomplishment of this prediction, nor God's promise to continue the kingdom in his family on condition of his obedience, could prevent Jeroboam from promoting idolatry, on motives of

worldly policy, and persisting in it, in defiance of the solemn warnings of the prophet, who came out of Judah. Chap. xiii. And in this sin, the majority of the nation, and all his successors, except the last, followed his example. However, as he could not plead even a misinformed mind in his excuse; so, in the time of his distress, he did not pretend to apply to the priests of his idols, but sent his wife in disguise to the prophet Ahijah; not indeed to ask his counsels or prayers, but merely that he would prognosticate the issue of his son's illness. By the reply of the prophet we are informed of a miracle of grace—that the young son of this wicked king possessed a good disposition toward the Lord God of Israel. Leaving therefore the case of the father, we will attend to the character of his son, and endeavour to improve it for the benefit of all, especially the younger part of my auditory. Let us consider,

FIRST, The description given of young Abijah.—“*There was found in him some good thing toward Jehovah, God of Israel.*”

This good thing was, no doubt, the same thing which we often denominate the *grace* of God in the heart; taking the name from its *cause*, the kind and efficacious influence of the Holy Spirit; or from its *seat*, a new heart, a right spirit, a holy disposition; or from its principal operations, the *fear* of God, or true *faith*. The *former* is the phrase most commonly used in the Old Testament, when a greater display was made of the more awful truths of religion; the *latter* is more generally used in the New Testament, now the way of salvation is more fully brought to light.

Whoever is made a partaker of this blessing, has some *spiritual knowledge* of the true God, i. e. knowledge attended with approbation of his true character. Such will prize the means of knowledge, and long to attain more of it. They will be pleased with every fresh discovery of his glorious perfections, and of his holy will. He that is rightly disposed toward the Lord God of Israel will at once *revere* him and *love* him. He will stand in awe of him, acknowledge his authority, and readily confess his dependence and obligations. He will dread displeasing him, grieve for dishonoring him, and lament past or present sinfulness.

He will prize his favor, seek it in his appointed way, make a covenant by sacrifice, and will love Christ Jesus. He has an *inclination* and *resolution* to serve the Lord. He will shun evil company, associate with God's people, value his worship, labor to promote it, will long to see others serve the Lord, and help them to serve him.

Some "*good thing toward the Lord God of Israel*," is here mentioned as a *rare* and *peculiar* qualification. Oh! this indicates general and early depravity; but so it is. Were we not depraved, the first inquiry made by young people would be after God; much more would they listen to instruction when given, and repeated with earnestness. But alas! it is rare in all men, in every age. It was rare among the sons of the Israelites. Ah! and among Christians too! It is rare in young people, especially among those of higher rank; and above all, among children of wicked parents: yet even such are not out of the reach of divine grace. Let none therefore presume on privileges arising from birth. And let none despair who are willing to obey the call of God, and come to him in the name of Jesus.

It is a *very happy* thing to possess some good disposition toward the Lord God of Israel. Good, as right in itself; good, as advantageous to the possessor; good, as rendering him useful to others. Nothing else will *insure* a conduct amiable and useful to society. This may be partially discovered in some, who are destitute of true religion: but its continuance must be very uncertain, and its extent must be defective, if it be not grounded on religious principle. Nothing else will be a sure preservative in great temptations, and amidst the pernicious influence of bad examples. Nothing else will so endear a young person to all them that fear God, and are judges of true excellence. Nothing will afford such gratification to pious friends. Nothing can inspire us with such a hope of future usefulness. Nothing can insure you such support under troubles. Nothing else will be a safe preparative for another world.

Wherever there is "*some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel*," God himself will graciously notice it. Let it be

in ever so young a person, he disdains not the lisplings of children. Christ noticed their hosannas. He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me," &c. If none around help them, if they sneer at them, oppose them, or persecute them, yet he will not disregard them. God sees the heart. He produced whatever good is in it. There was none by nature. Little children need a Saviour and a Sanctifier, or they cannot be fit for heaven. Good men will notice it, with great pleasure. Even the irreligious may be forced to respect it.

THIRDLY: The destiny allotted him:—"All Israel shall mourn for him and bury him, for he only of Jeroboam shall come to his grave."

Alas! for Israel, they deserved not such a blessing, as for this pious prince to succeed his wicked father, with whose idolatrous measures they so readily complied; yet they should have some sense of his worth, and their loss; and the providence of God would distinguish him from all his father's family, in granting him an honorable sepulture. This would signify but little as to himself; but the discrimination would show both the divine approbation, and the respect of Israel for his memory. God may not always distinguish, in this manner, those whom he approves, nor may he exempt them from various afflictions before death, nor from an early death.

The text does not mention the heavenly felicity, for which his wicked parents had no regard: they knew little about that, nor did they concern themselves respecting it. But the word of God ascertains the eternal bliss of all, whether old or young, who die in Jesus. They shall be for ever with the Lord, and with all the blessed company of saints and glorious angels. There David would rejoice to see this son of Jeroboam, the enemy of his family. There, is perfect harmony, love, and joy for ever.

Now then, dear children, let me inquire, If the same can be said of you, as of Abijah—that in you is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel? Remember, God himself inspects your heart, and cannot be deceived. If there be no good thing in you toward God, how sinful and

unhappy are you ! No regard to God, whom angels love to obey, before whom devils tremble : God who made you, and keeps you alive, and is always doing you good ! It would be shocking and vile, if you had no love to your parents ; but it is still more shocking to have no love to God. What-ever may seem amiable, is superficial if you have no regard to God. You may be thought good-tempered, affectionate, grateful, and dutiful ; while you are not so to God. What shall secure you from falling into vile practices, when you become exposed to new temptations ? What shall support you under the troubles of life ? How will you encounter the king of terrors, who may be soon commissioned to call you hence ? Some have godly parents ; but unless you are truly sanctified you cannot have an inheritance with them. If you have not that advantage, you need pray the more earnestly, that God would show you mercy ; for you are in peculiar danger of eternal ruin. But if you seek the Lord, he will be found of you. And who can tell ? You may be the instrument of saving your parents too ! I have heard a few such instances, especially of one, a child of six years old, who rejoiced at the approach of the Lord's day, because "this is the day that my father is used to pray." The father was converted by hearing it.

XII.

INDECISION IN RELIGION.

1 KINGS xviii. 21.

And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions ? If the Lord be God, follow him ; but if Baal, then follow him ; and the people answered him not a word.

SCRIPTURE history and scripture doctrine greatly illustrate each other. I wonder how it is that they who do not admit the latter, can give any satisfactory account of the former. If I believed that Adam's fall had no connexion with the moral character of his posterity, I could never credit

the story of the flood. If I thought all men were more inclined to virtue than vice, I could never account for the prevalence of idolatry and war. If I disbelieved the depravity of mankind, I could never account for the perverseness of Israel. To me, it seems quite unphilosophical, to suppose one people, for so many ages, to have been different from all others. Besides, if they were so much worse than others, how can the enemies of sovereign grace account for their receiving greater favors than more virtuous nations? And if they were designed to be a fair specimen of human nature, how can we account for their ingratitude and depravity, but by allowing that mankind are desperately wicked? The history of the ten tribes especially shows this, who so generally forsook the worship of Jehovah, from the time of their revolt from the house of David, till their captivity by Shalmanezar. Nor could either judgments, or mercies, or miracles reclaim them: of which we have here a most remarkable instance. Well might Elijah expostulate with them; and well may we stand astonished, that this miraculous interposition had not a more lasting effect.

That astonishment, however, should not be confined to their case, nor should our censures be confined to them. We may wonder at least as much, at the indecision of many under the gospel dispensation, and well may we apply the prophet's expostulation to ourselves. Let us consider,

FIRST, The commonness of indecision in religion.

Under the best means of instruction how many halt between two opinions! And this, not so much concerning smaller points, or the mere externals: here they often decide fast enough, yea, too fast; keeping, without examination, to the form in which they were brought up, instead of diligently examining the scriptures. But while some are zealous for names and forms, which they were led to adopt by education or accident, how many are undecided on questions of the greatest importance.

Few indeed halt between *revelation* and *heathenism*. Though there are those who talk of "Jehovah, Jove, or Lord," as if it were no matter which were worshipped. However, I need not enter into an examination of the pre-

tensions of Baal, Jupiter, or Juggernaut, to prevent your giving them the preference to Jehovah.

There are those, in this country, who halt between *Christianity* and *infidelity*; and perhaps some of you sometimes think the Bible is true, and sometimes call its authority in question.

Others are undecided as to the *principal doctrines* of scripture; whether they shall admit, on the authority of revelation, any incomprehensible peculiarity in the divine nature, of which they could have had no knowledge had it not been revealed. The trinity, the incarnation, the divinity of Christ, the atonement, regeneration, &c.

Many are undecided between *self-righteousness* and *salvation by grace*: between self-sufficiency and dependence on divine influence. When these things are argued in the pulpit, they are ready to allow them to be true; but when they hear them sneered at, and misrepresented, they are ashamed to avow them; not having been deeply and experimentally convinced of their truth.

Many are halting between two opinions, respecting *sin* and *holiness*. Shall they forsake sin, as what will be sure to damn them? Shall they follow after holiness, as that without which no one shall see the Lord?

Others halt between *worldly pursuits* and *heavenly realities*. These may be regular and respectable in their outward conduct, good members of society; but they mind only earthly things. They sometimes think it will be proper to pay more attention to religion by and by; but at present they cannot find time for it. Some gainful project demands their attention at one time; and some perplexing disappointment, or threatening loss, occupies their minds at another; and so they are in danger of going on, till they are suddenly cut off by death, or unable to exercise their faculties, from disease or the infirmities of age. Let me endeavour to point out,

SECONDLY, The causes of this indecision.

The *ostensible* reasons often differ from the *real*. Perhaps, if you may allege the cause yourself, you will plead, that it is owing to the *difficulties* which attend the investi-

gation of religious truth. It cannot be owing to the *non-importance* of the inquiry, whether there be a God, a moral Governor, a future state; whether you are a sinner, needing a Saviour and Sanctifier; how God's favor can be enjoyed; how sin can be pardoned; how you can be made meet for eternal life.

I do not believe that it is owing to *want of evidence* of the inspiration of the sacred scriptures; nor yet to want of clearness and precision in the language of scripture, on all the principal subjects of revealed truth.

Nor will the *diversities of opinion*, among nominal Christians, excuse you; nor yet the *flaws* you can find among professors. A goodly number are agreed in all the main points; and multitudes are evidently sanctified by the truth, whose living and dying testimony demands attention. True, they are not perfect, nor do they pretend to perfection. Religion does not teach every one all the etiquette of politeness; but it teaches humility, sincerity, and benevolence.

Ah! I fear your indecision is chiefly owing to want of attention, diligence, and earnestness in your researches. How should you understand divine wisdom, without taking pains? Could you learn any thing else so lightly? I fear there is a want of seriousness and impartiality in your investigation. I fear that you have deep-rooted prejudices against the truth; that you are unwilling the obvious doctrine of scripture should be true.

I fear you want humility. You are not willing to admit the truth, that you are guilty and depraved. You are not willing to suffer reproach with the people of God; to have your name cast out as evil; to be despised as belonging to a sect every where spoken against.

I fear that you neglect prayer for divine illumination; for the assistance of the Holy Spirit, to lead you into all the truth.

I fear that you want faith in the divine testimony; that you are not willing to give implicit credit to God; and hence you so long halt between two opinions.

But now think of,

THIRDLY, The evil of indecision.

While you halt between Christianity and infidelity, you act, for the most part, as if the Bible were not true. But if it should prove true, where will your soul be at last? You

halt between the enemies and the friends of the great doctrines of revelation ; and meanwhile you neglect committing your soul into *his* hands, who alone can secure that precious deposit at the last day.

You halt between the opinion of the self-righteous, and of the advocates of the doctrine of grace ; and you go about to establish your own righteousness, and do not submit to God's method of justifying the ungodly, through faith in Christ, nor flee to him who is the end of the law for righteousness. Hence you have no stable peace, nor can you rejoice in an unseen Saviour, with joy unspeakable, &c.

Or you halt between the opinion of the abusers of evangelical truth, and of practical Christians ; and thus are in danger of deceiving yourself with a dead faith, separable from all other graces, which neither pacifies the conscience, purifies the heart, overcomes the world, unites with Christ, nor works by love.

You halt between the opinion of formalists and of real believers ; and thus you have but a name to live, while you are dead. You have frequent misgivings, lest all should be wrong ; and yet you often seem satisfied with a form of godliness, without the power ; and sometimes suppose it impossible for any one to obtain assurance in this life, and that it is presumption to hope in the glory of God. You question the truth of many scripture principles ; and your own practice frequently contradicts those which you acknowledge. Thus, as the apostle James observes, of the double-minded man, you are "unstable in all your ways:" often yielding to temptations against the feeble remonstrances of conscience, often neglecting duty, and then trying to excuse the neglect by questioning whether it be duty.

In the meanwhile, time is flying apace ; eternity draws near ; your ideas of religion, instead of getting clearer, become more confused, your convictions feebler, and your heart harder : you have no spiritual peace, no heavenly enjoyment. You will soon lie on a death-bed, if indeed you should have one ; and soon will your state be fixed, fixed unalterably, and for ever.

If you do not soon decide for God, God will number you with his enemies. If you do not choose to be saved in God's

way, you will never be saved at all. If you choose sin, you must take the consequences. If you refuse Christ and holiness, you virtually refuse heaven. If you hate him, you act as if you loved death.

How happy are they who are truly on the Lord's side!

XIII.

THE FEAR OF GOD A PRESERVATIVE FROM SIN.

NEH. v. 15.

But so did not I, because of the fear of God.

MEN are often very ready to deceive themselves with a mere *negative* religion; not reflecting that the law of God requires, and the gospel cordially received effectually inclines, not only to depart from evil, but to do good; to follow after positive holiness, or active conformity to the divine image, without which no man shall see the Lord. But, if closely examined, even upon the head of negatives, how deficient would the religion of most people appear! There is no certain preservative from evil, but the fear of God powerfully ruling in the heart; but *that* principle, in proportion as it prevails, will have the effect. It will fortify the soul against temptation, and induce us to say, with Joseph, "How shall I do this great evil, and sin against God?" or, with Nehemiah in the text, "So did not I, because of the fear of God."

FIRST: Let me briefly define what is intended by the fear of God.

It is frequently put in the Old Testament for the whole of religion. In the New Testament, faith is more commonly used. Not that the former is now superceded, much less abolished. See Acts ix. 31. "The fear of the Lord, and comfort of the Holy Spirit." But under the former dispensation, God made a fuller display of the perfections that belong to him as a *Governor*: now, without eclipsing them, he has revealed more of the attributes of a *Father*.

The fear of God is not a mere outward form, or show ; nor yet a mere tormenting dread of punishment ; but an internal, reverential regard for God, arising from a just acquaintance with his moral character, a sincere approbation of the whole of it, a conviction of his relation to us, and a cordial submission to his authority ; which will be only increased by a sense of his goodness, and especially by beholding his concern to discountenance sin in the very mode of granting pardon to sinners.

It is an evil and bitter thing, an original defect in the disposition of man, or a strong evidence of human depravity, that they are not naturally disposed to the fear of God, or to entertain a just reverence of him, and pay a supreme regard to him.

Happy they in whose hearts God has implanted his fear ! He is happiest who fears him greatly.

SECONDLY : Let me show the superior tendency of the fear of God to preserve from sin, beyond any other principle whatever.

It will assuredly tend to keep us from sin, both against God and man. For if God be truly regarded, we shall have respect to the whole of his will, and respect him as regarding not only his own rights, but those of the universe. However men may attempt to separate a regard to God and to their fellow-creatures, they are inseparable. He who regards God aright, regards him as the author, centre, and head of the universe, or of the whole created system. And he that seeks the true interests of men, seeks their being brought into the closest union with God.

The fear of God is the best, and in a manner the only preservative from moral evil. If we abstain from an evil act from some inferior motive, there is no virtue in that abstinence. We do not abstain from sin as sin, unless we abstain from it on account of its contrariety to God.

Very inferior motives may often deter a person from the indulgence of some *particular* evil. One sin may clash with another. But the fear of God will be a much more *extensive* and *universal* preservative from sin ; and it is a strong evidence of our being actuated by it, when our concern is sincere and prevalent to be kept from sin in *general*. Inferior

motives may keep us from sin *occasionally*. Thus Esau was prevented from attempting to kill Jacob, by his natural affection for his father. But the fear of God will be more *constant* and *abiding* in its operation. It is a blessed evidence that we are kept from sin by the fear of God, when we *continually* watch against it.

Other motives may induce us to shun sins which are generally thought *scandalous* and *odious*. But if the fear of God rules in our hearts, we shall be careful to avoid those which are generally *excused*, or even *applauded*.

Mere worldly motives may often prevent our being *singularly* wicked ; but will not restrain us from following *plausible precedents*. Whereas, the fear of God will operate in this case, to keep us from that which has long been sanctioned by *custom*, and general connivance.

Men may be restrained by inferior considerations from *open* and *visible* sin. Though not condemned by every body, it would be by some of our acquaintance, &c. But the fear of God will be a blessed preservative from the most *secret* sin, even if we have no fear of detection.

Many unrenewed men may dread the commission of downright *gross* wickedness. But the genuine fear of God will excite us to abstain from the very *appearance* of evil ; yea, to know the utmost extent of duty, to know how far the fear of God would lead us.

THIRDLY : Let me endeavour to make as close an application as I can of the subject.

O my hearers ! How do you feel at the proposal ? Do you plead inwardly, as David for Absalom, “ Deal tenderly with the young man Absalom ” ? or do you wish—O God, help the preacher to be faithful ; that if we have indulged any sin whatever, it may be detected and cast out ; and that henceforth we may be able to say concerning it, “ So did not I, because of the fear of God.”

Examine, as to disposition and conduct towards God and man. The generality of mankind are satisfied if they do not profane God’s name, and wholly neglect his worship and ordinances. Happy are you, if you can say, So do not I ; I am concerned to love God supremely, and to abide under the influence of his love and fear continually. They are

content if they are not injurious to mankind. Happy are you, if you can say, So am not I. I am concerned to feel and show the influence of universal, disinterested benevolence. They are content if they are free from gross idolatry. But though they give not the name of God to another object, they give God's place in their hearts to many others. Happy are you, if you can say, "So do not I, because of the fear of God." At least I cultivate a godly jealousy, lest my nearest relative, or the friend that is as my own soul, should get into God's place in my heart. While others are content not to *call* any thing God, are you concerned not to *treat* any thing as God, but God?

How many are content with any form in which they were brought up. But happy are you if the fear of God leads you to search his word carefully, that you may worship him only in the way therein appointed. Others profane his name, or think it is a great thing if they use it not in cursing, or false swearing. Are you concerned not to use it in trivial blessing, or to use it in vain in prayer?

Others profane the Lord's day, or think a bare attendance on ordinances a great matter. Does the fear of God excite you to hallow it, and be dissatisfied without communion with him? Others violate his commands, respecting their fellow-men, or content themselves with a superficial obedience. Are you concerned to be conformed to the law as spiritual, and in its most extensive latitude? Not only not to kill, but not to be angry without cause, nor yield to a malevolent wish? Parents, children, masters, servants,—watch against the most customary omissions. Dread even an impure thought, or polluted jest; a dishonest inclination, or most secret cheat; a false inuendo, though none could prove it a lie; a covetous desire toward any thing that is your neighbour's; an envious, revengeful thought, or any reluctance to do them good, or any pleasure in their misfortunes.

Happy are they, who in these and other similar cases, can adopt the language of the text, and say, "So did not I, because of the fear of God." If others indulge inconsistencies, are careful only to avoid gross evils, are partial in God's law, are concerned to make clean the outside of the

vessel, &c. wish to know the least measure of grace; are satisfied with bare hope of safety, satisfied with being religious themselves, chiefly concerned to have their children great in this world, treat worldly riches as the chief good for themselves or families; happy are they who can say, "So did not I," &c.

Oh inquire, wherein have you denied yourselves for God? What is the indulgence from which you have abstained, merely on a religious account? What is there concerning which you may say, I felt temptations, but I fell not in with them; I might, and should have done so and so, but for the fear of God.?

XIV.

THE JOY OF THE LORD THE BELIEVER'S STRENGTH.

NEH. viii. 10.

For the joy of the Lord is your strength.

WE have, in this chapter, an account of a most solemn assembly of the Jews at Jerusalem, after their return from captivity; when they met together, and desired Ezra to bring forth the law of the Lord, and read it to them; which he did from morning till noon, in a broad street of the city, the courts of the temple not being sufficient to contain the concourse of the people. So they read, Ver. 8. &c. And, as probably many of the people in their captivity, had not had an opportunity of being so well acquainted with the law of Jehovah before, they were much affected therewith, and almost overwhelmed with sorrow. But Nehemiah and Ezra endeavoured to restrain and moderate their grief, as excessive, and not seasonable at a time, when they were assembled to keep a holy feast to Jehovah, who had showed them peculiar mercies.

As they increased in the knowledge of the divine law, they increased in the knowledge of their sins, and became more sensible of their guilt and danger, and were excited to mourn for their transgressions. This was a proper and salutary

effect, if kept within due bounds; but they must not so indulge their grief as to overlook their mercies, and forget the chief design of the present festival, which the Lord would have them observe with joy and gladness. Hence they were exhorted to repress their grief, and turn their thoughts to the divine mercy, as having abundant cause to hope and rejoice in Jehovah. On this occasion they might lawfully enjoy the bounties of providence, as far as consistent with temperance and sobriety, and in connexion with charity to the necessitous. And particularly they were encouraged to indulge a holy cheerfulness of mind, which was recommended as a happy means of invigorating and strengthening their souls. "*The joy of the Lord is your strength.*"

This observation is doubtless as applicable to the people of God under the New-testament dispensation, as under the former economy; and the provision *now* made for the strong consolation and spiritual joy of believers is much more abundant. Let us therefore attend to three inquiries.

FIRST: What are we to understand by the joy of the Lord; and what is the nature of that joy?

By the joy of the Lord we are to understand joy *authorized* by the Lord. He has given his people leave, yea, given them commandment, to rejoice. See Deut. xii. 18. Ps. xxxiii. 1. xcvi. 12. Phil. iii. 1. iv. 4, &c. He has said it shall be well with them, in the worst of times. Whereas, sinners are commanded to be afflicted, weep, and mourn. James iv. 9. v. 1. "For it shall be ill with them," &c. The joy of the Lord is joy *in* the Lord. God himself is the object and ground of it. Ps. xliii. 4. God is the saints' exceeding joy. We joy "*in* God." Rom. v. 11. The joy of the Lord is joy *given* by the Lord. God is the author of it, by his gracious influence on the soul. The fruit of the Spirit is joy. Gal. v. 22. The kingdom of God is joy. Rom. xiv. 17. God fill you with all joy. xv. 13. The joy of the Lord is somewhat of the *same kind* with the felicity of the Divine Being. The believer enters into the joy of his Lord. Matt. xxv. 21. He rejoices in that wherein Christ rejoiced on earth. Luke x. 21. In that joy which is founded on his word. John xvii. 13. In that wherein Christ now rejoices in the

presence of his Father. Acts ii. 28. Yea, in that which is ground of everlasting joy to the most happy God.

The nature and properties of this joy, abundantly distinguish it from carnal mirth. It is founded in knowledge and truth; and not, like the joy of the wicked, in ignorance and delusion. The more the believer has just ideas of all things around him, the more cause he finds for joy; as the knowledge of truths the most humiliating and alarming, need not interrupt his joy, if other truths are but realized at the same time. Rather they will add to it.

It is joy which the world can neither give nor take away. The greatest influx of temporal blessing cannot produce it. The lowest ebb of adversity cannot annihilate it. It is not transitory and vanishing; but its grounds are permanent and enduring; though its exercise is not equal. It is not intoxicating, ensnaring, and debasing: but ennobling and sanctifying; raising up the soul to God, and producing conformity to him.

SECONDLY: What are the principal grounds which God's people have for joy?

They have reason to rejoice in the very nature and perfections of God. It is ground of joy to know that an absolutely perfect Being exists, and that he is at the head of the universe.

They may justly rejoice in the peculiar discoveries he has made of himself in his holy word; that he has condescended to reveal his will to us. Especially they rejoice in the declarations of his grace and mercy to sinners, through Christ Jesus. Rom. v. 11. Else what would it avail to know our duty, when we could never make the least amends for past sins?

They have ground for joy in the tenderness, compassion, and faithfulness of our Great High Priest, to all those who return unto God by him;—in the high privileges conferred on all true believers, as adopted, justified, sanctified, sealed to the day of redemption, and having evidence of interest in eternal, unchangeable love.

They have reason for joy in the exceedingly great and precious promises contained in the word of God;—in God's providential care for his whole church, and his attention to the concerns of every individual;—in the provision made for his people in the upper world. Rom. v. 2. They rejoice in hope

of glory ;—in the expectation of the happy and glorious issue of all the affairs of the universe.

THIRDLY : In what respects is the joy of the Lord the strength of his people ?

The joy of the Lord is our strength, as the consolations of the gospel are necessary to enable us to attend upon duty with cheerfulness and alacrity, and thus greatly endear divine ordinances.

It tends to excite and encourage holy activity in every good work, as well as in immediate acts of devotion.

It enables the believer to escape the snares of prosperity, and sustain the pressures of adversity, thus living above the smiles and frowns of the world.

It greatly fortifies the soul against temptation, and enables the believer to withstand the manifold attacks of his spiritual enemies.

It particularly assists him to recommend religion to others around him. Zech. viii. 23.

It encourages him to face the last enemy, death ; and enables him to vanquish the king of terrors.

How groundless are the suspicions which some entertain of a religious life, as if it were the way to absolute melancholy ; and required us to bid farewell to every enjoyment : when it only calls us off from rejoicing in a thing of nought, to joy in God.

It is true, that at present, the Christian has his sorrows as well as his joys. Religion occasions new pains, as well as new pleasures. But sin must justly bear the blame of the former. Sometimes, through temptation, imperfect views of the gospel, defect of faith, or careless walking, his sorrows may be greatly multiplied : otherwise the most humiliating views of ourselves would not prevent our joy in God ; but rather increase our admiration of the riches of grace, and of God's great salvation.

At the same time, let us remember that, if our joy in God be genuine, it will strengthen us to do and suffer the divine will ; it will excite to holy obedience, and to benevolence and beneficence towards man.

The higher hope and joy are raised, the more will tenderness of conscience be increased. The banishing of servile fear will increase reverential awe, humility, and watchfulness.

XV.

THE BENEFITS OF AFFLICTION.

JOB v. 17, 18.

Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth : therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty. For he maketh sore, and bindeth up ; he woundeth, and his hands make whole.

THOUGH Eliphaz, as well as the other friends of Job, was inclined to great severity, and indulged suspicions of his sincerity, for which he had an insufficient ground,—and unjustly inferred his former hypocrisy from his present affliction ; yet, in this chapter especially, he offers much good advice, and evidently admits such premises as might well have rectified his own erroneous conclusions. It is hard for us, in critical circumstances, to act in perfect consistency with our own acknowledged principles ; and harder still, for persons, in severe trials, to take the best advice which is mingled with unkind reflections. The best of us would be badly off, if God had not more patience with us, than we have with one another.

The language here used would lead us to conclude, that the happiest persons in our world, are not those that are always or generally exempt from trouble ; but those who have a certain refuge, sufficient to afford them relief in time of trouble ; who have learnt those lessons which are often taught in the school of affliction ; and whose successive trials are overruled to make them more perfect in those lessons.

All good men have not an equal measure of affliction ; much less are all bad men exempt from it. But all men are liable to it, good men as well as others, who often have a large share. Neither affliction nor the want of it, will prove our interest in God's favor ; but the sanctified improvement of affliction will go far towards evincing that we are his peculiar people, and truly happy ; nor has it been unusual for God to make use of affliction, in first bringing them to make him their refuge, who had not before realized their need of him.

FIRST, Men in general, especially in time of ease and prosperity, are apt to indulge many erroneous notions, and neglect many important truths.

I do not mean that they would avow all the former as their settled opinion, or expressly contradict the latter; but they act more agreeably to them than to these.

As to God, themselves, other men, this world, and the world to come. Though they may not deny God's existence and supremacy; their entire dependance upon him, as to this life; and the importance of seeking reconciliation to him, and of devoting themselves to his service; yet they forget these truths, and act as if they disbelieve them. Though they know they must die sometime, and may die soon; though they admit the immortality of the soul, allow their responsibility to God, and perhaps will not dispute their danger, as fallen creatures, guilty before God, needing pardon and renovation; yet these things lie with little weight on their minds. Judging by their conduct, you might suppose they disbelieved them.

Though we often see others in affliction, and know we are liable to the same; yet we seldom feel rightly for them, or discover a due spirit of sympathy, till we have had a taste of the cup of affliction ourselves, and hereby learn, not only our dependance on God, but even in various respects on our fellow-men, even those in lower stations in life. It would be easy to prove, by argument and by fact, the vanity of the world, and of the petty distinctions in which the men of the world pride themselves; but it is hard to bring home these truths to affect the conscience and heart, so as to hide pride from man, and cure the love of the world. Invisible realities ought to outweigh temporal shadows; nothing should so engage our anxiety as our future and eternal destiny; but multitudes have their attention engrossed by the cares of life, and the love of earthly things, so as to leave no room for the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Even those who have professedly admitted the truth, need to have its impression revived, and to be guarded against the delusive misrepresentations of the world, of Satan, and of their own treacherous and backsliding hearts.

SECONDLY, God often employs afflictions as a means of correcting our mistaken ideas, and rectifying our foolish propensities.

The original expressions are used in much the same latitude

as the English. *הוֹכִיחַ* *to correct*, is generally used for verbal correction; to convince of the truth, especially of a fault. *מוֹסֵר* from *יָסַר* *to chastise*, more usually denotes correction by punishment, or parental discipline; which Solomon assures us is not only consistent with love, but an evidence of it; and so we are told, “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth,” &c. “Behold happy is the man whom God correcteth. Therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty.”

Affliction is often the means of impressing our minds more deeply with a sense of our dependance on God, and our need of his favorable regard. Affliction tends to remind us of the evil of sin, of the power of God’s anger, and the necessity of reconciliation to him. It tends to convince us that the world cannot make us happy; that “they build too low for bliss, who build below the skies.” It tends to convince us that man, at his best estate, is vanity; that the petty distinctions in which so many pride themselves, are comparatively of little importance indeed. Ah! how easily can God strip us of our idolized enjoyments, or render them of no avail to our happiness. How often do riches “make to themselves wings and fly away,” &c. How unable are they to profit in the day of wrath. How is the strength of the most robust turned into weakness, at the touch of the Most High. “When God with rebukes doth correct a man for iniquity, he maketh his beauty to fade like a moth.” Ps. xxxix. 11. Even the finest mental powers are easily thrown into disorder by the force of disease. Or the parents of a numerous family have to leave their substance to strangers. “Lo these things God often worketh with man, that he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from men.” Affliction tends to convince us of our need of divine guidance and support; of the necessity of humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God; of seeking an interest in the favor he beareth to his people; and of “laying up treasure in heaven, where neither rust nor moth can corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal.”

THIRDLY, When this end is really answered, the man who has been most severely chastened, may well think himself happy.

It is a happy thing to be deeply and practically convinced of our entire dependance on God ; that all we receive is his gift ; that he can continue or remove, bless or embitter it, at his pleasure ; that every creature is that to us, and no more, which God makes it ; that felicity cannot be derived from the world, but only from God himself ; that his favor is better than life, and his displeasure worse than death.

It is a happy thing to be made attentive to our own best interests ; to feel the worth of the soul ; to know our lost condition as fallen creatures ; to be humbled in the dust before God, under a sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin ; to be made importunate for the blessings of salvation, a title to eternal life, and meetness for God's heavenly kingdom.

It is a happy thing to feel our need of God ; to be obliged to be constant and importunate in our applications to the throne of grace ; especially for spiritual blessings, the comforts and aids of the Holy Spirit, and the earnestness of future bliss.

It is an advantageous thing to be kept from idolizing the world ; to be constrained to make glorifying God our chief business ; and to be excited to earnest concern for all our connexions and relations, that they may, in like manner, be prepared to exchange time for eternity.

The man is happy whom God correcteth. For, if our hearts are rightly disposed to seek him as the all-sufficient God, he will not reject us ; we shall find him all-sufficient indeed, for our eternal salvation, for our present support, and for an external change in our favor if it be really most for his glory.

Though he may wound us sorely, by cutting convictions of sin ; yet he will bind up the broken heart, by discovering his pardoning mercy.

Though he may wound us sorely, by tearing away our idols ; he will make us whole, by uniting our hearts to himself.

“ Though no chastening for the present be joyous, but grievous ; nevertheless, it afterwards yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised therewith.”

Though we should be afflicted as heavily as Job ; yet God can restore to temporal prosperity, if it be his good pleasure.

If affliction should continue till death ; yet then sorrow and sighing shall flee away for ever.

XVI.

THE DEATH OF THE AGED BELIEVER.

JOB v. 26.

Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season.

THE text is the language of Eliphaz, who in this chapter gives Job some very good advice, and some suitable encouragement; though he was mistaken in his implication, that Job's present affliction necessarily argued previous hypocrisy; and too positively assumed it for a certain fact that a return to God would insure temporal prosperity.

The simile in the text is very beautiful, and well adapted to illustrate the death of an aged saint; though it is far from being a fact that every saint has long life, or is equally happy and honorable in death. Yet, to every believer, death is a transition to a state of honor and happiness; and where grace has long and eminently influenced the life, there is a peculiar propriety in applying this comparison to illustrate the nature and circumstances of his removal.

We cannot, from the general tenor of scripture confirm *this* doctrine, viz: That whoever is sincerely devoted to God shall undoubtedly prosper in this life, for a long period, and at last be visibly honored at his death, by God and man.

But we may easily prove *this* doctrine; viz. That the aged believer, who after a holy and useful life, dies in faith, does come to his grave, like as a shock of corn cometh in, in his season.

FIRST: The death of an aged believer, full of days and full of grace, is like the gathering in of a shock of corn, in his season, as it is a *seasonable* and *expected* event.

It is according to the usual course of God's providence, or agreeable to his stated rule, that if godly men are not removed sooner, they should be when they are in a full age. So Abraham, Gen. xxv. 8. Isaac, xxxv. 29. David, 1 Chron. xxix. 28. God, indeed is not confined to a particular time. Some are removed at an earlier period, full of grace, though not of years; as Abijah. There is no certainty as

to the precise time of cutting down God's corn. God has a right to choose which shock he will reap first. And it is best for us that it should be uncertain. But when old age is come, death will not long delay. When the corn is ripe, it will be gathered pretty soon. We must not murmur when God removes the first ripe fruit. But when it is fully ripe, it is evidently time to reap ; it is a thing quite in season.

SECONDLY : The death of an aged believer, is like a shock of corn coming in, in his season, as it is a *desirable* and *happy* event.

It is not desirable in some respects, to us who are left behind, to part with such venerable friends ; except when we see them first broken down by affliction, &c. But it is desirable to the believer himself, and a very happy event. It is desirable to the angels, and to the saints who are gone before. They will feast on the truth and goodness of God, as manifested to their newly glorified brethren. It is desirable to Jesus Christ, whose husbandry all the church is ; that he may reap what he sowed in tears, and watered with his precious blood. It is his blessed will to have all his friends about him, and he must have it accomplished.

THIRDLY : The death of aged believers, like the gathering in of corn in his season, is an event for which *much preparation* has long been making.

Christ himself died, that his death and resurrection might secure the happy death and resurrection of his people. He sowed the heart with grace, that when it was ripe he might reap. He converted his people from the likeness of a barren waste, into that of a fruitful field : and regulated all the seasons to ripen their graces. He commanded his beams of grace to shine upon them ; and caused his Spirit to operate, like the wind and rain, to bring them to perfection. To this end God has employed both his providences and his ordinances ; the labors of ministers, and of fellow-christians ; and the believer's own prayers and endeavours have also been directed to this important end.

FOURTHLY : The death of an aged believer, is like the gathering in of a shock of corn in its season, as it is an event for which he is *actually ready*.

Every one who is regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and justified by faith in Christ is, in one sense, ready for death. But where grace is in lively exercise, and has been matured by a long course of experience, there is a more visible and actual readiness, or meetness for glory. When harvest is at hand the corn is more solid and substantial. Its own weight bows it down toward the earth. It is ready to fall out of the husk, and shed itself, when quite ripe. So, it is a pleasant sight, to see that an aged believer has more solid and substantial religion, deeper humility, and sense of his own unworthiness; longing for the heavenly state; ready to welcome death, on account of the state of perfection that shall then ensue.

FIFTHLY: The death of an aged believer resembles a shock of corn coming in, in his season, as it is a *useful* and *advantageous* event.

Though a loss in one respect, it is often very instructive and edifying to those who are left behind. The peaceful fruits of righteousness then discovered are advantageous to honest spectators. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace." It gives weight to their preceding testimony, when they die looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ.

SIXTHLY: Yet the death of an aged believer, like the gathering of corn, leaves a *barren* and *melancholy appearance* on the place it once filled, unless the ground be sown soon for another crop: and the season of harvest is a *prelude to wintry weather*.

How should we then pray the heavenly husbandman to prepare another crop: and bless him, when, instead of the fathers, he raises up the children to serve him. How should ministers be willing to plow and sow in all weathers, and Christians unite in endeavouring to weed and water the new corn. Let us pray that we may be ready for all storms. When the righteous are taken away from the evil to come, some must stay behind. But God can repair all losses, and make all weathers subserve his husbandry.

SEVENTHLY: When a shock of corn is cut down, and gathered in fully ripe, it is not in order to destroy it, but *to lay it up in security*; and so it is in the death of a believer.

Christ will gather his wheat into his garner; and then, whatever weather may be in the fields, the wheat in the barn is not affected or injured by it. They who are fallen asleep in Jesus, are no more exposed to trials, temptations, or distresses of any kind. They are safe and happy. The fruit is gathered for life eternal. "They shall hunger no more, and thirst no more;" sorrow no more, and sigh no more.

From the whole, we should learn, Not to sorrow for those who have died in the Lord, as those who are without hope. We would not forget them, but love their memory, follow their faith, and copy their example. Bless God for them, and for all his goodness to them, both in life, and in their departing moments. Pray for a like degree of actual readiness for death. Seek growth in grace, faithfulness in old age; yea, let the young seek this, who may be soon cut down. And as God is removing the aged, let it be the concern of children to fill up their parents' place.

Let those who are not ripening for heaven, remember that they are ripening for hell. Joel iii. 13. God will soon say of sinners, "Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe; come, get you down; for the press is full; the fats overflow, for their wickedness is great."

We are all ripening for heaven or for hell; if it be not for the former, it must be for the latter. But we cannot be ripening for heaven if we are not partakers of divine grace; or if we are not concerned to grow in grace; nor is there any likelihood that they are preparing for heaven, who never think of heaven, nor have their conversation there.

XVII.

TRUST IN GOD UNDER CHASTISEMENTS.

JOB xiii. 15.

Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him.

JOB, though an eminently godly man, and one who excelled especially in patience, yet was found, upon his being

severely tried, defective as to the degree of his graces, and even in that for which he was most remarkable. Though God himself decided the controversy between him and his friends, and he was nearer the truth than they; yet he let several expressions drop from him, that did not become his lips. Therefore, when we select any passage from his speeches, or those of his friends, we must be peculiarly careful to compare them with other scriptures, that we may ascertain how far the sentiments contained or implied in them are just.

With this proviso, we would proceed to consider the words of our text, and propose to examine,

FIRST, What grounds may we have to imitate the resolution expressed by Job, in the former part of this verse? "*Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.*"

A sense of the mighty *power* and all-sufficiency of God may convince us that He is able to raise us from the lowest state of depression. Job, indeed, did not expect this change of his outward circumstances upon earth; yet it came to pass. He looked forward to a joyful resurrection, which every true believer in Christ is warranted to expect. xix. 26. And if we realize the power which can insure that event, we may well trust in God, though with humble submission, for any preceding change of circumstances which shall be for his glory. 2 Cor. i. 9.

A sense of the divine *wisdom* may persuade us that God has ends worthy of himself in all his dispensations, even in those which at present appear most mysterious and intricate. He can turn sorrow into joy, darkness into light, and bring good out of evil. What he does you know not at present, but shall know hereafter, and find he has done all wisely and well.

A deep conviction of the infinite *rectitude* and absolute *perfection* of the Most High, may justly assure us that he will in no case do wrong: as Elihu remarks, xxxiv. 23. xxxvii. 23. Could we fully realize this, we might be well satisfied to be in his hands, were it not for guilt lying on the conscience, and leading us to dread his displeasure.

A sense of the free and sovereign *love* of God to sinners may encourage us to hope in him, notwithstanding the

greatest unworthiness. This is much more clearly manifested since the days of Job ; especially since our Lord appeared in the flesh ; though Job was not without an acquaintance with the promised Saviour.

A clear knowledge of the gospel *plan of redemption* may justly encourage us, even under the most impressive conviction of our own guilt, and of the utter insufficiency of our own righteousness to justify us before God, to depend on the great propitiation.

A sense of God's *omniscience* may encourage the believer to trust in him, who is acquainted with his sincerity, and knoweth the way that he takes. He cannot deny himself, nor reject the soul that is one in desires with him. xvi. 23. x. 11.

A conviction of the divine *veracity* and *faithfulness* may encourage us to rely on the divine word ; to depend on the promises and invitations of the gospel. And if we doubt our interest in the former, yet the latter may authorize and encourage those who never applied to the Saviour before to come now, without money and without price, to receive a free salvation ; which God has engaged never to withhold from those who are willing to accept it wholly and freely.

A foretaste of the *bliss* which God has prepared for them that love him, may well support the soul under the heaviest trials we can encounter, and almost annihilate the sufferings of the present state.

Job does not seem, in general, to have had much of this enjoyment ; yet a glimpse of it, at times, calmed the perturbation of his mind ; and if we are enabled to realize the complex descriptions now granted us, it may well raise us, both above the troubles of life, and all the terrors of death.

SECONDLY : How far may we conceive Job, or any other person, justifiable in such a determination as that contained in the latter clause : "*I will maintain mine own ways before him.*" ?

Job had a right to insist upon it, that he never had committed in secret those gross sins with which his

friends accused him. They had insinuated suspicions before; but then Eliphaz proceeded to absolute charges, though all without proof, except that of his afflictions. He might justly appeal to God for the contrary. Job had room to persist in a profession that he was not a hypocrite, as they so often suggested. He was not a dissembler in religion, nor one who served God for selfish ends. And others may have the like consciousness.

But Job, through the pressure of affliction, the power of temptation, and the irritation of controversy, went sometimes too far in self-justification, and perhaps these words had a tinge of the same spirit.

When God afterwards appeared unto Job, though the controversy was decided in his favor, that he had been neither an oppressor nor a hypocrite; yet he did not attempt to answer Jehovah, except in language of the deepest self-abasement. He saw more imperfection and pollution in himself, than he ever before imagined could be found in him; and was ashamed that he had been more anxious to vindicate his own character than God's. "Behold I am vile! I repent, and abhor myself in dust and ashes."

We should therefore learn from the whole, to unite humble confidence with holy reverence.

The language and the history of Job are calculated to encourage us to trust in the Lord in the darkest times. We see what sore and accumulated afflictions may try those who are dear to God; while yet the Lord may at length bring them forth as gold, and show that his end is merciful. Or, if trials should last till death, then shall the days of the believer's mourning be ended. Let them, therefore, that know the name of the Lord, put their trust in him; yea, let them resolve, "*Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.*"

Neither the greatest pressure of natural evil, nor even the deepest sense of moral evil, should prevent our forming this resolution. "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy." It tends to honor God, when we trust in him in times of the greatest trouble. Hab. iii. 17, 18. When stript of all other comforts, surrounded with trials; in such circumstances that nothing could

bear us up, but a view of power, wisdom, and all-sufficiency absolutely infinite. And still more, when a sense of our great sinfulness would overwhelm us with total despair, were it not for the infinite riches of grace, the infinite fullness of Christ, and the immutable faithfulness of God to his word.

But to trust God in a direct view of his all-sufficiency, grace, and fidelity to his promises, is a very different thing from every species of self-confidence. It is directly opposed to self-confidence, or that dependance on our own righteousness, which leads us to reject the sacrifice of Christ. Job contended justly, though sometimes too eagerly, that he was not a hypocrite, but he never pleaded that he was not a sinner. vii. 20. ix. 2. 20. He relied on the promised Redeemer.

Genuine faith is also opposed to that presumptuous confidence which emboldens a man to believe his good estate on the ground of some supposed former experience, though he is now going on in an evil way, and has no present exercise of grace, nor concern about it. The stronger a man's confidence is in a course of backsliding, the more room there is to suspect his hypocrisy; and when sincere souls are in doubt about the past, their best way is to come afresh to God now.

Do you know any thing of this trust? Have you renounced every other confidence but the living God? Have you been led to despair of finding happiness but in him? of enjoying his favor only through Christ? Do you look for perfect happiness in an invisible world? Relying on a Saviour you have never seen, do you trust in him, though unworthy and guilty? Renouncing every other dependance, wholly distrusting yourself, do you trust him with your immortal soul, and its eternal interests? And with all your present concerns? Though not exempt from trials, can you trust him in death? Can you plunge into eternity?

XVIII.

THE SUPERIORITY OF MAN OVER THE IRRATIONAL CREATION.

JOB xxxv. 11.

Who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven.

JER. viii. 7.

Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord.

UPON reading these words only, there seems an opposition between the language of Elihu, and that of Jeremiah; but on looking back at the words which precede the former passage, both writers will appear fully to agree in their estimate of the moral character of man; though Elihu's observation will justly remind us, that the strange stupidity of man, is owing, not to the want of natural faculties, but to his sinful disposition, and so is not of the excusable, but of the criminal kind. My design, therefore, is to call your attention to two principal subjects.

FIRST: The superiority of man to the irrational creation, with respect to his natural powers.

Do not think, Christian brethren, that this will be a dry or uninteresting subject. Its consideration is needful to enhance our gratitude; while it will help us to estimate our obligations, so it will aggravate our guilt: but it may be turned to a good account.

Though some irrational animals may exceed man, in particular respects, yet he possesses those advantages which give him a decided superiority to them all.

The birds can soar aloft in the atmosphere; the fish can swim in the mighty waters; many beasts excel man in swiftness, and others in strength; yet he can conquer and tame, subdue or destroy them.

Animals may excel man, in such senses as are requisite for their preservation; but he has a far greater extent of capacity

for attaining general knowledge, and accurately investigating the whole of nature : whereas all *their* knowledge is confined to a narrow sphere.

The capacity of animals admits of no improvement that is serviceable to themselves ; their instinct is no more sagacious than it was in the earliest ages. It is rather diminished, than improved, by being under the care of man. Nor do long-lived animals make any important progress in knowledge. But man is capable of improvement as long as his powers remain undebilitated ; he may be learning in old age ; and were his life protracted, his improvement would be without bounds ; as good men's shall be in another state.

Man has a far superior capacity of sympathy with his own species. Not only is parental affection more durable, but the social affections are far more extensive.

Man is capable of looking backward and forward : he can search into the past history of his species, and regard his remote posterity : he is affected by the state of his fellow-men, in distinct parts of the globe, and different periods of time ; interesting himself in whatever concerns mankind ; exulting in the diffusion of human happiness ; yea, in the felicity of all holy intelligences.

Above all, man is capable of moral government : of forming an idea of a first cause, and a moral Governor ; inquiring into his nature and will ; being influenced by hopes and fears of rewards or punishments : as expecting the approbation or disapprobation of his Maker, according as he has united with him in design or opposed him.

No inferior creature has any powers suited to this noble employ of *intentionally* glorifying God, or hoping to enjoy him, that man has, if he were not indisposed by sin to a due improvement of them. This leads us to consider,

SECONDLY : The degradation of man below the irrational creatures, through his depravity, perverseness, or wilful stupidity. “ Alas ! there is none who saith, Where is God my maker ? ” “ The ox knoweth his owner,” &c.

The evidences of this sinful stupidity are abundant. The sottishness of men without divine revelation. Idolatry. Isaiah xliv. 10. 20. Horrid form of idols. Vile notions of

invisible deities. Among the heathen we find no just view of moral government; no anxious inquiries after God; no fixed standard of morals; but wicked rites, and human sacrifices. And there has been no emancipation merely by reason. Idolatry still subsists. The perverseness of man favored with revelation. The Jews were prone to conform to the heathen. Neglect of divine injunctions—prevalence of sin—opposition to prophets. Jer. xxv. 3, 4. 7. Hos. viii. 12. Jer. viii. 8, 9. How is revelation still disregarded by nominal Christians, Greeks, Papists, Protestants! The neglect of their powers by the ignorant. Even here, in a Christian country. How little are many above the brutes, and in some respects far below. The abuse of their powers, by the learned and refined. Profaneness of many, among the polite and educated. Surely they know enough to perceive the folly and sin of the practice. How deplorable is the atheism of some, who are extensively acquainted with the animal frame and wonders of creation. They admire any thing rather than God, and study any thing but religion. The injuries offered by man to man. In private life, sometimes to relatives; by wars, slavery, &c. Beasts of prey never made such havoc. War begets poverty; poverty, peace; and then they quarrel again; and so they would go on, till the last conflagration, if God had not promised to pour out his Holy Spirit. The enmity of man to God. Brutes are incapable of this unwillingness to realize his being and perfections. How vile is the abuse of his name, day, word, and people. The violation of all the commands of his holy law. Even by those to whom it was given in writing, and who have often heard it explained and enforced. The opposition often made to the remonstrances of conscience, strongly testifying against sin. Ps. xxxii. 9. The stupid neglect of the glorious gospel, even by such as do not pretend to deny its truth. The improvidence of men for futurity. Though there is an appointed time for man on earth, and he knows his present existence must soon terminate. Brutes have no distant foresight of death. Death is as certain as the approach of winter. Man's thoughtlessness in prosperity. Not like

the bee, providing for winter. His stupidity or rebellion in adversity. Not willing to receive correction; (Job xxxvi. 10.) not humbling himself under the mighty hand of God, but often trespassing and rebelling more and more. Man learns not by his own experience. "Surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird." The meanest of quadrupeds will shun snares and traps. Few beasts will drink intoxicating liquors; and I have heard credible accounts of such as resemble man in shape, which after once finding the effect of such liquors, could never be induced to taste them more. Yet men, conscious that they are ruining body, substance, family, and soul, can seldom be reclaimed from that which it would be a slander on brutes to call a beastly crime.

Man is more insensible than the beasts to the obligations of gratitude; especially towards God.

It is a strong evidence of the corruption of human nature, that there is so little proportion between our disposition to resent injuries from our fellow-men, and a disposition to remember favors. But our obligations to God are far greater, and our sense of them far less.

From the whole, then, we may learn, How evidently does man still possess those faculties which are requisite to constitute him accountable and criminal. If men cannot *deny* their fallen state, they love to misrepresent it, as if it were a state merely pitiable, sunk below obligation; in which they are as innocent as stocks and stones. But how false! Yet how great is man's depravity, criminality and misery! How impossible that he should help himself; or that help should arise from any other source, but sovereign, wonderful, efficacious grace!

XIX.

ON CONTEMPT OF GOD.

Ps. x. 13.

Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God?

THERE are two principal objects kept in view in this Psalm. First, To show that though God may seem for a

while to forget his people, yet he will in the issue be their refuge. Secondly, To show, that though he may seem for a season to connive at the ungodly, yet he will reckon with them severely at last. As good men may be tempted to murmur and despond, through a forgetfulness of God's faithful promises; so bad men often are hardened in their iniquities, through their disbelief of his righteous threatenings. "Because judgment is not speedily executed against an evil work, therefore the hearts of many are fully set in them to do evil."

The wicked, as the text imports, contemns God; he saith in his heart, Thou wilt not require—God will not call us to any very exact account—it is no very awful thing to think of appearing before him. But as the charge implied in the text is very heinous, some may almost question whether any can be guilty of it, and many may be unwilling to acknowledge themselves to be guilty of it. Let me therefore,

FIRST, Attempt to bring home the charge.—"The wicked doth contemn God."

Many are guilty of this wickedness. Not merely among those who have the fewest advantages, but among those that are favored with the best advantages for knowing him. Heathens show a superstitious regard for the meanest of idols; while Christians, so called, contemn the living and true God.

I shall not dwell on the conduct of such as are openly profane and profligate; who avow infidelity, and ridicule the very form of godliness. I shall not enlarge now on the profane abuse of the name of God, which is used more ridiculously than the name of any other being on earth. I shall not talk of the grosser violation of the sabbath, by those who neglect all public worship.

But I charge all those with contemning God, who live habitually in sin, of whatever kind; who make light of doing what they know God has expressly forbidden; or think it a small matter totally to neglect what they know he has commanded.

If you allow the Bible to be the word of God, and yet very seldom *read* it, at least with seriousness and self-application; never asking, What does God say *of* me? What does he say *to* me? What does he command? What does he forbid? How shall I enjoy his favor?—do you not

“contemn God.”?

If you never *pray*; never seek God’s face; never ask his favor; never deprecate his displeasure; never confess your sins; nor flee to the refuge set before you in the gospel;—do you not “contemn God”?

If you *hear* the word of God with indifference; if you willingly give up your mind to wandering imaginations; if you plan the commission of sin in the very house of God; if you try to get rid of every slight impression the truth made on your mind while there;—do you not “contemn God”?

If you endeavour to prevent *others* from paying more serious attention to religion than yourselves; if you try to laugh them out of their concern for salvation; if you show your dislike to them on account of their seeking God;—do you not “contemn God”?

When you disregard the authority of God in his holy *commandments*, and virtually say, I will not do as he bids me; or, I will do what I like, though he has forbidden me;—surely you “contemn God.”

When you are not alarmed at his *threatenings*, though they are pointed directly against you; as, “The wages of sin is death.” “The soul that sinneth shall die.” “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, written in the law to do them.” “Except ye repent, ye shall perish.” “He that believeth not is condemned already: the wrath of God abideth on him.” “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven;”—you “contemn God.”

When not allured by the *kindest displays of his grace*. He hath sent his Son to seek and save the lost: he has sent to you the ministry of reconciliation; an embassy of peace. God beseecheth you by us, to be reconciled; and do you hold fast deceit, and refuse to return to the Lord? Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, long-suffering, and forbearance? and even of his dying love? Alas! it is too common a case, that men make light of this great salvation. When, invited to the gospel feast, they with one accord begin to make excuse—they “contemn God.” But oh! what excuse will suffice?

We propose,

SECONDLY, To examine what excuse can be made by the sinner for his contemning God. “Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God?”

Do you know nothing of him? Have you had no opportunity of acquiring some knowledge of him? Hath he left himself without witness? Can the maker of this beautiful universe be a contemptible being? Do not the heavens declare his glory, and the firmament show forth his handy works? Are you not fearfully and wonderfully made? Has he not revealed himself to *you* in his word? Is there any thing contemptible in the scriptural character of God? Does it not unite all that is great, and all that is good? Is there any blemish or defect in his character or government? Could any alteration be made for the better, in either? Has not God laid you under infinite obligations to revere him, and love him? Is he not the Father of spirits, the author of your existence, your preserver and benefactor? Is not his eye upon you continually? Does he not know all your ways and your heart? Are any of his commands unreasonable? or would it be a good thing if they were reversed or repealed? if all men had leave to hate him; or were enjoined to hate one another? Would you have others released from the obligation to love him and their fellow-men, as well as yourself? Are the divine threatenings very trivial, and not to be dreaded? Cannot he that made you, cause his sword to approach unto you? Whether the fire of hell be literal or metaphorical, will it not be most tormenting? If God be resolved to show to all the universe how evil a thing it is to disobey him, will he not make their plagues marvellous, who fall under the weight of his anger? "Can thine heart endure, or thy hands be strong, in the day when he shall deal with thee?" "Who can dwell with everlasting burnings?" Does God so uniformly defer the accomplishment of his threatenings, as that no bad consequences are to be dreaded at present? Do you believe that his enemies have the best of it in this life? Do you believe they will be best off at last? Will you avow it as your opinion—Blessed are the proud, and wretched the humble! Blessed are the lascivious, and wretched the chaste! Happy are the covetous, and wretched the generous! To swear is genteel and respectable; but to pray is mean and vulgar! To despise the Bible is a mark of genius; to revere it a

sign of folly ! Or will you say, Let me have the pleasures of sin for thirty years, and I'll risque the pains of hell for ever ? Let me laugh now ; and have weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth hereafter ? Let me be honored now, and let me awake to everlasting contempt at last ? Let me be wealthy on earth, and fare sumptuously every day ; and Lazarus may enjoy Abraham's bosom alone, through all eternity ?

Does religion make its votaries unhappy now ? Are those that have most of its power, the most gloomy and melancholy ? Is it discouraging to read of such lives as those of Joseph Alleine, Janeway, or Pearce ? Do you think any king on earth is happier than Carey, or Vanderkemp ?

Will you say all professors are hypocrites ? If they were, that would be a reason not to be what they are ; but no reason not to be what they pretend to be. But conscience will testify against you, while you so insinuate. Many have given unquestionable proof of sincerity.

Are you sure of plenty of time to repent ? And are you wisely employed in making work for repentance ? In doing what you must undo, or be yourself undone ?

Are Christ and salvation of no worth ? Is heaven contemptible, and hell desirable ? Are the joys of heaven too pure, too refined, too exalted, too angelic, too divine, to be worth pursuit ? Is not communion with " the spirits of the just made perfect, with an innumerable company of angels, with Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and with God the judge of all," to be preferred to the company of your present wicked associates, and of sinners already departed ? Had you rather spend eternity with Cain and Ham, and Pharoah, Korah, Ahithophel, Gehazi, Judas, and Nero, &c. than with Abel and Noah, Moses and Elijah ; with Paul and John, and all true saints ?

Need I do more than appeal to your own consciences ?

THIRDLY, Let me show the greatness of the sinner's guilt and folly.

To contemn God, is a sin which is in a manner confined to our race and our world. It is a sin which sinners could not be guilty of, were it not for divine patience and forbearance ; and of which none can be guilty in so aggravated a

manner, as sinners under the gospel. It is a sin which will be more thoroughly cured in hell than any other; yet will add more than any other to the torments of hell.

XX.

THE WANDERER RESTORED.

Ps. xxiii. 3.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for his name's sake.

DAVID, in this Psalm celebrates the divine care and goodness, especially as exercised respecting his spiritual concerns; and beautifully illustrates it by a metaphor, exceedingly plain and easy to be understood by all, and peculiarly suited to his own case, as being taken from that employment in which he was engaged in early life. David himself had been a good shepherd, and had ventured his life for his sheep. He knew the toils and cares of that occupation, and the attention necessary, especially in oriental countries, to the most useful and most defenceless species of creatures which God has formed for the service of man. He knew also the strong propensity of those animals to wander: and he knew his own heart, his original apostacy, and remaining propensity to wander from God. Ps. cxix. 176. Perhaps his great backsliding had not taken place when he composed this Psalm, yet he had room for this humble acknowledgement—"My soul will he restore, he will lead me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." Have not we need of the same consolation, and for the implied confession?

Let us consider, my brethren,

FIRST, The necessity of this blessing.

We have all wandered from God in our natural state. "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned aside each to his own way." Not all so far, or so visibly. God has hedged us in and prevented us, by education, affliction, or various restraints; at which we have perhaps murmured, instead of being thankful.

Was there not a time when you took no delight in God?

when you paid no regard to his authority? when perhaps you had no thought of your own eternal interests? If you regarded God at all, it was merely the effect of fear, not of love. You had no relish for his green pastures, you loved to *wander*, and attempted to derive your chief happiness from another source.

Happy is it, if you have now returned to the “shepherd and overseer of souls.” But will you not own it was the Lord who brought you back? Even since you have known the Lord, and tasted that he is gracious, have you never found a propensity to depart from him? Are you not chargeable, at least with heart-backslidings? Have you no proneness to forget the Lord? to intermit the exercise of faith and holy love? If you forsake not the assemblies of the saints, yet are not your closets seldomer visited than formerly; and your private devotions more slightly performed? Has no idol intruded into your affections? Have you no room to say, “O that it were with me as in months past!”? Cannot he whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and who declares that all the church shall know that he searches the hearts and the reins, say, “I have somewhat against thee”? If not, yet beware; you are yet in the body.

But many must own this: yea, still worse, their zeal has visibly abated: yea, they have evidently turned aside from God. Ah! foolish and ungrateful souls! how forgetful of all his benefits! Yet blessed be God for his restoring grace! Let backsliders implore it. Let us all prize it. Consider,

SECONDLY, The value of this blessing.

How great a thing was it to be brought back to God at first! Never should we have returned to him of ourselves. Sheep are seldom known, like some domestic animals, to return. Sinners never do return, and never would return, were not the good Shepherd to seek them.

“Jesus found me when a stranger,” &c.

He himself is the way; never could we have had access to God, but through his righteousness. His Spirit alone guided us into the way of peace. He induced us to comply with the call of the gospel. He made us willing to return unto God.

Oh what mercy has been manifested in healing our backslidings since ! notwithstanding all the baseness and ingratitude that have attended them ; though we have sometimes given occasion to the enemies of religion to reproach the ways of God, or at least have not honored God as we ought to have done. And we should probably have wandered much farther, had not the Lord interposed for our restoration. Sometimes providences, surprizing and unexpected, or perhaps painful and severe, have been subservient to this purpose ; sometimes stated ordinances ; sometimes brotherly reproof. But whatever means were used, it was the Lord who gave them efficacy, and rendered them successful to bring us back to himself. He has inclined us to place our happiness in him, to seek him in the way he has prescribed, to return to a state of voluntary subjection. Which leads us to consider,

THIRDLY, The evidences of our partaking of this blessing.

Have we been thoroughly convinced of our original departure from God ? its reality, iniquity, folly, and ruinous tendency ?

Have we been convinced that it is our duty and privilege to return home to God ? that this is best, wisest, and happiest ?

Do we heartily acquiesce in God's method of saving sinners, in a way that shall demonstrate his righteousness and magnify his law ; even through the mediation of that Saviour, on whom the Lord laid our iniquities, and who laid down his life for the sheep ?

Are we willing and desirous of walking before God, in the ways of righteousness ; regarding his blessed word as our directory in our conduct towards mankind, as well as respecting the immediate worship of God ?

Do we consider the law of God as spiritual ; requiring truth in the inward part ; and extending to our *temper*, as well as to our outward visible practice ?

When we wander from God, are we filled with pain, and shame ; and do we find that we cannot be happy till our souls are restored, and we return to the paths of righteousness ?

Are we conscious that we need the continual attention of our good Shepherd, to keep our minds from being bewildered with error, our wills from disobedience and rebellion, our affections from being inordinately fixed on some inferior good, if not on some forbidden object : or to

prevent us from degenerating into self-righteousness, sloth, or worldly-mindedness? Do we long for farther progress in the good ways of God; to know, love, serve, and glorify him better; desiring to walk on as pilgrims, till we arrive at a state of absolute perfection? Are we conscious that what our gracious Lord has done for us, is all of his sovereign mercy? He hath wrought it for his name's sake, and not for our righteousness' sake. All our salvation flows from the riches of his grace. Do we earnestly wish to honor God's name; and to be to the praise of the glory of his grace?

Oh let us admire and adore the Lord our shepherd, and acknowledge our obligations to his matchless goodness, as displayed both in our first conversion, and in all our subsequent experience.

May they, who are still wandering away from God, have their feet directed into the way of peace; be led into the ways of righteousness; and find them ways of pleasantness, and paths of peace.

XXI.

THE WAY OF BELIEVERS.

PSALM xxxvii. 5, 6.

Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.

It seems probable, that David, who composed this Psalm in his old age, intended it principally for the direction and encouragement of his son Solomon, who was first anointed king before his father's decease, while he was young and tender, and not without factious enemies; whose destruction is here foretold, and his prosperous reign predicted, in such terms, as may justly lead us to consider it as typical of the spiritual kingdom of the Messiah, David's greater, though remote descendant, especially as it shall appear in the latter days. But the instruction and consolation of this Psalm must not be confined to Solomon. It is inserted in the sacred canon for our benefit; and as to this clause in particular,

Solomon himself has set us an example of applying to others what his father first addressed to him. Prov. iii. 6. xvi. 9. The great question is, Who are warranted to take the encouragement? And the best answer is, They who are satisfied with the directions here given. I propose,

FIRST, To delineate the way of every true saint.

The real believer has a peculiar way, a course of his own, by which he is distinguished from other people; not a way of his own devising, but of God's prescribing; not a way he chooses for the sake of singularity, for he would be very glad for all others to walk therein. But he has a peculiar end which he pursues, different from the generality of the world; and he must take a peculiar course to attain it. His end is that which ought to be the end of all, even to glorify God and enjoy him eternally. But what can be more evident than that this is not the end which is actually pursued by most people? No; they would enjoy themselves and the world, not God; or if they want his favor, yet it is not for its own sake, but merely to subserve some other inferior end. Whereas God is the saint's chief end, his exceeding joy, and he would glorify as well as enjoy him. No wonder then that he should have a peculiar way, when he has so singular an end. He has a peculiar way of thinking. Others may pretend to agree with him in the mere outlines of his creed, or in terms and phrases which he adopts; but true saints only enter into the spirit of it. He has peculiar views of God and Christ; of sin, self, the world, life, death, and eternity. He has a peculiar way of acting. Who will believe that there is any thing peculiar in your creed, if there is nothing peculiar in your conduct? "If you know the truth, the truth will make you free." Can you think differently of *Christ* from others, and yet feel no more influence of his love, and act no more like him? Can you think differently of *sin*, and yet practise it as much as others? Can you think meaner of *self* before God, and yet be as proud as others toward men? Can you form a true estimate of the *world*, and yet pursue it as eagerly as others? Can you think more of *eternity*, and yet be engrossed by time? No, surely.

The believer is one who walks in a different way, a narrow

way, a way which is scarcely visible to a carnal eye. For example, He would *draw nigh unto God*, in such a way as shall secure the divine honor. He would be so admitted to the enjoyment of God, as that God shall be glorified. Now none can thus approach a holy God but by Christ. Hence a man must renounce all dependance on self-righteousness, and yet be zealous for the practice of good works. He would *walk before God* in the way he has prescribed; both as to every part of instituted worship, and as to the general observance of moral duties. In all the *particular actions* of life, he would still keep the same end in view; to glorify and enjoy God. Religion must influence our civil concerns, our connexions in life, our management of worldly business, or we give but little proof of its reality.

As the believer's end is never fully attained in this life; as it is impossible to have enough of God on earth; therefore he must be a pilgrim all his days, hold on, seek another country, and live as bound for heaven.

SECONDLY, Consider the direction given him respecting his way.—“*Commit to the Lord thy way.*”

This presupposes a concern to take the way the Lord approves, and to which he has directed us. Or else it would be an insult to commit it to him. Now, whether we consider the believer as to his way of thinking, his way of worship, his way of action, or his way of managing his temporal concerns, this is his great desire, to keep inflexibly to the way of truth, holiness, and obedience. He does not want to know what is any other person's way, but which is God's way; not which is the commonest way, the most fashionable, the most creditable, the most easy, the most lucrative; but the true, right, strict, holy way, which God has appointed; the way which Christ trod before us. This way he would keep, in the Lord's strength; looking to him for aid, to enable him to persevere in this good way, and hold on to the end of his pilgrimage. In this way he would walk at all events, leaving consequences with God: though he should meet with reproach and loss, the frowns of men, persecution, or death itself. He would look to the Lord to vindicate him from all unjust aspersions, which he may suffer for his name's sake. He

would look to him for success, in promoting his kingdom, and for the happiness he desires at his journey's end.

In the original, it is, "*Roll thy way.*" A catachresis, the harshness of which may be removed by supposing an ellipsis, *Roll (the burden) of thy way.* Though above fifty manuscripts have *לל* from *ללה* he unveiled. Jer. xi. 20. *αποκαλυσον* LXX. True believers have many burdens by the way. Some they must bear with all the way. Others press upon them more occasionally. But they are encouraged to roll both on Jehovah.

The vast importance of his soul's concerns, and the awful alternative of endless happiness or misery, is a weighty burden, under which a man could scarcely bear up, were it not for this most gracious permission. A sense of the worth of his soul, and of the greatness of his guilt, with the dreadful consequences of a mistake, is an awful burden.

The importance of a holy life lies with weight on a good man; its numerous duties, and various relations. The opposition to be expected and endured in God's service, from the world, the devil, and the flesh, adds to his burden. He often fears he shall not stand his ground, nor hold out unto the end.

Trust also in him. There is no room for confidence in the flesh, but abundant ground of strong confidence in God; for acceptance through the mediation of his dear Son; for assistance from his Holy Spirit in the discharge of every duty; for succour against all the allurements of sin, and attacks of Satan; for support under all manner of trials in life; for deliverance from the sting of death, and the power of the grave; for actual attainment of all your heart's desire.

THIRDLY: The promises made to encourage our compliances with these directions.

He shall bring it to pass. That is, the Lord will bring you to the final enjoyment of that which is the object of your ultimate pursuit. He will assist you in the prosecution of your laudable designs for his glory. (Solomon's Temple.)

You shall obtain every subordinate wish, that would really conduce to your chief design, in proportion as you actually make it subservient thereto, and commit it to the Lord in faith.

He shall also bring forth thy righteousness as the light, &c. He will cause the righteousness of his people to appear in judgment, as clear as the sun at noon-day. He will show their salvation and acceptance with God to be perfectly consistent with God's glory and righteousness. He will manifest the sincerity of real saints, and prove that they were no hypocrites or impostors. He will show that they took the right way; that they were no fools for adhering to Christ, and his truth, and his holy ways. Fanatics and enthusiasts pursue shadows, and neglect the substance; weep at the representations of known fiction, and pay no regard to the sufferings of a crucified Saviour. God will manifest the integrity and righteousness of his people, not only in general, but in particular acts, for which they had been unjustly reproached and censured. This is often accomplished in part on earth, and shall be fully at the last day.

Oh let it be our chief concern to know, and keep the way of the Lord. Enquire not, What is man's way? but, What is God's appointed way, the right way, the scriptural way, the way of truth and holiness?

If we are conscious that this is our desire, let us trust and hope in the Lord. If we be reproached for Christ's sake, all is well. So Moses reckoned. Heb. xi. 25; 26. The Judge standeth at the door.

XXII.

PRAYER FOR THE SPREAD OF DIVINE KNOWLEDGE.

PSALM lxxvii. 2.

That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations.

WHAT a difference appears between the spirit of the ancient believers of the Old Testament, and the spirit of the degenerate Jews in the time of our Lord and his apostles; or of their descendants at this day! The former, as genuine children of Abraham, in whose seed all the families of the earth were to be blessed, prayed that God would make "known his way upon earth, his saving health among all nations." But the

latter begrudged the Gentiles any share in the benefits of Messiah's coming, and forbade the apostles to speak to them that they might be saved. 1 Thess. i. 16. Their posterity have not equal power to persecute; but appear wholly unconcerned respecting the fulfilment of the promises to the gentiles; though they look for a very low accomplishment of those that were made to their own nation. Which of these do we most resemble? Poor is the evidence we can give of our own interest in salvation, if we do not long for others to be made partakers of the same blessedness. Let us then notice,

FIRST, The object of the Psalmist's request.

It evidently expresses the warmth of his zeal for the divine glory and the fervor of the most extensive and disinterested benevolence. His desires respected not the mere temporal happiness of men, nor even the spiritual interest of Israel alone; but the general display of the divine excellence and glory, and the happy and extensive cure of human wretchedness. He uses two expressions which are somewhat metaphorical, but if not synonymous, are closely connected; praying,

First, For the knowledge of the divine way by the inhabitants of the earth. Ah! is it not to be lamented that God should be so little known in his own world? When this prayer was first uttered, scarcely any knew his way but the inhabitants of Judea. Now, some knowledge of God is much more widely diffused; but the greatest part of mankind are still pagans. Mahomedans are more numerous than all classes of nominal Christians; papists than protestants; and of the latter how few have evangelical views, and fewer still have the power of godliness. Well may we pray that God's way may be known upon earth, his saving health among all nations. The way of God's conducting himself toward men; how he created the world; how he inspects and preserves it; how he regulates events; how he exercises a moral government; to what issue he will bring all concerns, calling all to an account, and rendering righteous retribution; the way he has prescribed to rational creatures; how he would be worshipped, whether by images, or by prayer; how he would have us to express our inward feelings to him; how

he would have us act toward one another ; what he approves, and what he disapproves. Now, how shall we certainly know all this without a written rule ? Heathens could never settle the point ; nor can modern reformers, who reject revelation. The late German philosopher, the famous Bahrtdt, would have all public teaching confined to natural religion. Another, in 1795, proposed to enjoin farther restrictions, (as there may be disputes about a future state, providence, or even the existence of God,) and to inculcate only self-government, justice, and beneficence. Oh what a blessing to have a better directory ! The way which God has planned for the return of fallen creatures to him, and their re-admission to his favor. Here the light of nature could do nothing, but the gospel gives a satisfactory reply to the most important of all our inquiries. It reveals a great salvation,

Secondly, For the communication of saving health to all nations. Oh ! how much do all nations need it ! Sunk in ignorance, vice, and wretchedness ! Generally idolaters ; for ever at war ! Oppression or discord prevailing internally. Millions held in slavery. Millions more in external poverty and wretchedness. All sunk in vice, without just ideas of God ; without peace of conscience, the love of God, or the well-founded hope of happiness—happiness of such a kind as God need not be ashamed to give, or which shall indeed be the participation of his own blessedness. But the gospel brings saving health to every individual who embraces it. It heals his spiritual blindness ; removes his love of darkness ; gives just, endearing, glorious views of God. It heals his guilty conscience, and fills it with that peace which passes all understanding. It heals his disordered affections, and fills the heart with love to God and man. It cures sinful selfishness, and love to the world : sets the heart on things above, and unites the saved in one body. Did it generally prevail among all nations, it would utterly abolish idols, and banish false religion. It would put an end to wars and slavery. It would prevent oppression, envy, slander, falsehood, and all injustice. In short, it would make earth a paradise, the very suburbs of heaven. Need I then add,

SECONDLY, The reasons why we should earnestly unite in this prayer?

From the consideration of the wretched state of all nations, and the long time they have continued in such a state, we have room to conclude that they will never be brought into a better state without divine interposition; there is no reason for hoping that polytheism or idolatry will be cured without the blessing of the divine word. None have been recovered yet, by the light of nature. Indeed, we cannot judge how much truth would be discoverable by the light of nature, if men were quite of a right spirit, and disposed to seek earnestly after God; and if right views of God suited their hearts, from what they actually have discovered: for even where revelation is enjoyed, thousands are found, who, though they do not deny its authority; yet overlook its plainest discoveries. As to those who have only natural light, enough is discoverable to leave them inexcusable. Little is actually discovered of what is plain in itself. Nothing could be discovered to afford sure ground of hope to a sinner. God has amply encouraged us to expect that his gospel shall be much more extensively known; and that the happiest consequences shall result from its propagation. He has certainly sufficient power to overrule events in his providence to subserve this blessed purpose, to remove all obstructions, stir up ministers, and influence hearts to receive his truth. The welfare of our own souls is very closely connected with our entering into the spirit of this prayer. We cannot enjoy much of the salvation of God without longing for others to participate of its inestimable benefits. Nor can we be very earnest in seeking the universal prevalence of the gospel, without feeling our own souls brought into a better state, by the very desires we feel, and by the exertions they produce, and the obligations we shall feel laid upon us to a conversation becoming the gospel. The providence of God is now evidently at work; and nothing can tend so much to keep us from being improperly affected by a partial view of civil transactions, as an earnest attention to the concerns of the kingdom of Christ. This will keep us from meddling with things out of our proper sphere; keep us from vexing

our spirits with the concerns of those kingdoms which can be moved; keep us from sinking into gloom and despondency; and encourage us to hope for better and brighter days. When the correcting hand of God is stretched out upon all the nations, what shall we then answer the messengers of the nations? That the Lord hath founded Zion, and will make her a praise and rejoicing in the whole earth.

XXIII.

MEDITATION ON THE DIVINE DISPENSATIONS.

PSALM lxxvii. 6.

I call to remembrance my song in the night. I commune with mine own heart, and my spirit made diligent search.

WHETHER the Psalmist more immediately refers to his own personal and private distresses, or whether he principally had respect to the afflictions of the Christian at any particular period; the description given in this Psalm of the painful exercises of his mind, and the method he took for relief, is certainly calculated to instruct and encourage others to imitate his example, and to make the Lord their refuge in every time of need.

In the text three remedies are pointed out to the afflicted, the benefit of which the Psalmist could testify, from his own experience.

FIRST: The recollection of former enjoyments and consolations.

There is a little difficulty in settling the construction of the former clause, into which it would be improper to enter critically in the pulpit; and taking it just as our translators have understood it, it will be easily shown to agree with other sacred scriptures, though it may admit of a twofold explication.

Either—"I will now, in the present night of affliction, remember my former songs." 'Though this is a time of distress, and my present circumstances are gloomy, yet I have known brighter days. He that lifted me up, has cast me down, and he can raise me up again.' Sometimes this

reflection, indeed, adds a poignancy to our distress, as it did to David's trouble. Ps. xlii. 4. Yet it will bear a better improvement, which he seems to make of it; v. 11. and so Job, (ii. 10.) "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" And his case shows that after the most sweeping calamities the Lord can again give things a turn in favor of them that hope in him. Therefore, present troubles should not make us forget former comforts, especially as the former so much exceeded our deserts, and the present afflictions fall so short of our demerits.

Or, the text may mean, "I will remember how I have been enabled to sing in former nights of affliction." And surely it is especially seasonable to remember supports and consolations granted under preceding distresses. Elihu complained, (Job xxxv. 10.) "There is none that saith, Where is God my Maker, that giveth songs in the night." David comforted himself with the thought, "Though deep calleth to deep; yet the Lord will command his loving kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me." Ps. xlii. 8. And the Lord promised by Isaiah, (xxx. 29.) "Ye shall have a song as in the night, when a holy solemnity is kept." No doubt Paul and Silas remembered their song in the night, when imprisoned at Philippi; and it afforded them encouragement under subsequent trials. And cannot many of you, my brethren, in like manner, remember the supports and consolations you have enjoyed in former difficulties, and how the Lord turned the shadow of death into morning? And ought you not to trust in him that hath delivered, that he will yet deliver? He that hath delivered in six troubles will not forsake you in seven. The "clouds may return after the rain;" but not a drop can fall, without the leave of Him, who rides on the heavens for your help, and in his excellence on the sky. Did you not forbode at first a very different termination of the former troubles? and did the Lord disappoint your fears, and put a new song into your mouth; and will you not now begin to trust him, and triumph in him? Surely you have found, that the Lord can clear the darkest skies. "Light is sown for the righteous," and ere long you shall see an eternal day. If such songs are

given to the pilgrims in the night, how shall they sing in that world where the sun shall set no more ! There will be no night there !

SECONDLY, The practice of serious, secret meditation.—“ I will commune with my own heart,” expatiate, meditate.

The psalmist David recommends this in Ps. iv. 4. This is too generally neglected by irreligious people. They cannot bear reflection, they endeavour to shun serious self-examination. Nay, religious people are too deficient in this duty. When occupied with worldly concerns, they frequently neglect due attention to the state of their souls.

Some kinds of affliction afford a favorable opportunity, by confining us from more active employments. Others, though perplexing, and such as may lessen our leisure time, evidently call for it ; and if the mind be duly impressed, some season may be found for it. In the day of adversity consider.” Let then the afflicted learn of Asaph to commune with their own hearts.

Examine into the state of your soul. Are you made capable of reflection, and are you not bound to reflect on your dependance, responsibility, criminality, and danger ?

Commune with your own heart, and ask if you can prove by scriptural evidence that you are in a state of salvation ? Have you fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you in the gospel ? Are you cordially attached to the Saviour ? Do you rest with complacency in the way of salvation revealed in the divine word ? Are you at peace with God ? Are your transgressions forgiven ? your sins covered ? Are you a child of God, and an heir of eternal life ?

If not, how much greater trouble should your sins be to you, than all your outward afflictions ? How much more reason have you to be shocked that you should continue impenitent and negligent of the great salvation, than you have to repine at present troubles ? Acquaint yourself with the Saviour, and be at peace.

If you are reconciled to God, what reason have you to be thankful and submissive ? Can any temporal loss counterbalance the ground you have for joy in God ? Are not everlasting arms beneath you ? Is not everlasting glory before you ? Can any thing separate you from the

love of God, which is in Christ Jesus your Lord? Will not the wisdom that was sufficient to plan the salvation of such a sinner, in perfect consistency with the divine perfections, suffice to manage the most intricate concerns of this life, and to make all things work together for good?

THIRDLY, The diligent investigation of the end and design of the divine dispensations.

“The Lord doth not willingly afflict, nor grieve the children of men.” It is not from his heart, of his own inclination to afflict; (whereas he bestows undeserved favors of his own heart. 2 Sam. vii. 21.) When he afflicts his enemies, justice and the general good requires it. When he afflicts his friends, their own good requires it.

Let then your spirit make diligent search. Are you habitually acting contrary to God? preferring that which is not God, to the living and true God? Are your minds wholly carnal, refusing subjection to his law, and submission to his gospel? Is it not necessary that he should walk contrary to you? that he should show that this your way is your folly? that you who have forsaken the fountain of living waters, should find your cisterns are broken, and can hold no water? “With the pure thou wilt show thyself pure, but with the froward thou wilt wrestle. For thou wilt save the afflicted people, but will bring down high looks.” You must bend, or break. You must be weaned from the world, feel your need of a God, a Saviour, a better portion than any sublunary good, an eternal refuge; you must know sin to be an evil and bitter thing; you must be brought to pray, “Take away all iniquity,” or you cannot come to any good. You must be made humble, penitent, contrite, or you cannot be saved.

And if you are not converted, you must be made a monument of divine displeasure. God must get himself the glory you refuse to give him. You must be made useful to the universe in your destruction. But if you

are already a child of God, he must embitter all sin to you. He must not let you run away from him. He must restore your soul, and lead you in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. He must treat you as a child, and not as a bastard, who has no parent to acknowledge him, and take

the oversight of him, and care for his instruction. "What son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? Yet no chastening is for the present joyous but grievous; nevertheless it afterwards yields the peaceful fruits of righteousness, to them that are exercised therewith." Make then diligent

search into the general cause of affliction, and you will certainly find it to be sin. Make diligent search into the

particular cause of afflictions, and it will often be found to be some particular sin. "I will visit their iniquities with stripes." Often may God's own children read their sin in its punishment. Jacob deceived Isaac, by passing the younger son for the elder; Laban deceived Jacob, by passing the elder daughter for the younger. Rachel impatiently said, "Give me children, or I die." She had children, and she died. David despised the honor of God, and though God put away his sin, he severely corrected him. 2 Sam. xii. 9, 10, &c. Yet how much better is the sorest correction, than final impenitence and condemnation! Search the

Holy Scriptures. See God's dealings with others. Ps. xcix. 8. But will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favorable no more? No, he will not; "but though he cause grief, he will have compassion." Lam. iii. 31, 32. "He will rest in his love," &c. 1 Sam. xli. 42. And even as to those who had not yet humbled themselves before him, notice the language used in Levit. xxxvi. 41, 42.

XXIV.

ENLARGED DESIRES SATISFIED.

PSALM lxxxix. 10.

Open wide thy mouth, and I will fill it.

THE Psalmist, exhorting the Israelites to gratitude, reminds them of God's gracious deliverance of their fathers from Egypt, and introduces Jehovah himself as addressing them, in language expressive both of authority and kindness; encouraging them to enlarge their desires and expectations of of real good, and engaging to satisfy their amplest wishes, if,

conscious of their own wants, and the value of his benefits, they made application to him. "Enlarge, (or open wide,) thy mouth, and I will fill it." This gracious grant, though given originally to Israel, extends to all the true worshippers of God, to all who hunger and thirst after righteousness. It may also be considered as an invitation addressed to all who hear the gospel, encouraging the application of necessitous, perishing, hungry souls, who never applied to God before. I would propose to consider,

FIRST, The import and extent of the charge.

It is evidently an injunction and encouragement to prayer; to a humble application to God, and an enlarged expectation of good from him, answerable to our necessities and our requests. Its meaning is, Whatever you want, come to me for it. Let all your wants be upon me. I will supply you. I will satisfy your mouth with good. "I am God all sufficient." Ever treat me as such. "Ask, and it shall be given you."

But think not to ask *once for all*; you must come to me daily, apply repeatedly; keep constantly dependant; seek me, not occasionally, but live continually on my fulness.

Extend and enlarge your desires, so as to comprehend *the most excellent* blessings. Ask, not for temporal blessings only, which are transient, uncertain, and insufficient to insure real happiness; but ask chiefly for spiritual blessings; blessings for the soul, which shall fit it to glorify and enjoy God.

Ask, not merely for *some* of the blessings of the well ordered covenant; but for all of them. Let the whole of God's salvation be the whole of your desire, and it shall undoubtedly be granted.

Apply not merely for *some grace*, enough to secure your credit, or ascertain your safety; but for great grace, that God may be greatly glorified; for great faith, great love, great activity, fortitude, and fruitfulness.

Ask for blessings not merely for *yourself*: but for others also; for your fellow-christians, for the whole church. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper who love her." "They who mention the name of the Lord shall give him no rest, till he make his church a praise and rejoicing in all the earth." Cultivate universal disinterested benevolence. Seek earnestly

the salvation of souls ; of your family, and neighbours ; of your fellow-sinners to all the ends of the earth. God loves a public spirit. If we were more concerned for the increase of Christ's kingdom, what personal benefits would be added ! Embrace every opportunity of doing good to

others. Unite fervent prayers and unwearied efforts to do good. Beware of the inconsistency of opening wide your mouth, and shutting close your hands, or folding them together for sleep.

Seek not only their occasional and temporal good, but aim earnestly at the highest good of others, even their eternal welfare ; yet gladly promote their temporal interest also, as far as you can consistently with other duties.

Let the divine glory be the ultimate end in which all your desires terminate. Your own happiness consists in connexion and communion with God, in union to Christ and conformity to him ; and so does the happiness of others.

If then, you love your neighbour aright, you will seek *this* happiness for him. It is a poor love to a rational creature, which respects not his highest welfare. What a parent would that be, who to make a child happy for a day, should risque his being a beggar for life ! And what a foolish parent, who to make a child rich and great, and as it was supposed happy for life, should risque or promote his being miserable for ever ! If we love God rightly, we shall long to know, love, and serve him more and more ourselves ; and to have him known, admired, loved, obeyed, and glorified by others, more and more ; by greater numbers of our fellow-creatures, and in higher degrees.

SECONDLY : The ground we have to expect the fulfilment of this promise.—“ I will fill it,” says God. “ Open wide thy mouth, (i. e. extend thy desire,) and I will fill it.

Surely this teaches us, that the greater and more valuable the blessings are which we implore from the divine beneficence, the more sure shall we be to receive them in answer to prayer.

We are universally dependant on God, and it becomes us to ask of him our daily bread, to acknowledge him in all our ways ; in every thing by prayer and supplication making known our requests unto him. But, though

men are to be blamed, that they so seldom acknowledge God in any thing, yet they are still more to be blamed, that they seek not from him the chief good. Men may however possibly cry to God for inferior things, and apply in vain. Even good men may ask for temporal blessings and not receive them; because the things we suppose good, may *not* be good, or not good *for us*, or not good for us *at present*. But none shall seek to God for the best of blessings in vain. If we ask *enough*, we shall have it.

When Alexander told Anaxarchus to go to his treasurer, and ask what he wanted, the treasurer was astonished at his asking so great a sum, and would not pay it without consulting Alexander. "It seemed too much for one man to receive." But the king said, "It is not too much for Alexander to give. He does honor to my riches and liberality, by so large a request." So is God honored by the prayer of faith.

Consider the inexhaustible fulness and all-sufficiency of Jehovah. He is infinitely rich. A boundless ocean of bliss. The waters of the sea can as easily satisfy the great whales, which God has made to play therein, as they can the smallest marine insect that lives in them. Consider the infinite liberality of the divine nature. God is the great benefactor of the universe. He takes a godlike pleasure in the communication of good; and the greater the blessing, the more his benevolence is displayed and gratified in the bestowment. No creature can have wants too numerous, or too extensive for him to be able or willing to supply. Though we are sinners, who have forfeited all good, and deserved all evil, yet God himself has provided a method of reconciliation, and laid up abundant goodness for such as are in the covenant of grace. "It has pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell" in the blessed Mediator. "He has received gifts for men." Every obstacle which might have hindered the communication of good to sinners is removed by Christ's mediation. Now therefore, the more God bestows on the believing sinner for Christ's sake, the more he is honored and glorified. The exceeding riches of grace are the more illustrated. The Father gives a greater

proof of his love to Christ, and shows more clearly his love to obedience, and to the law which Christ so highly honored ; thus both his government and grace are more exalted. When God bestows spiritual blessings, they may justly be considered as the earnest of more. For God never gave grace, without a design to give more grace ; yea, and glory too. Eph. i. 14. God is not likely to be offended with our asking too much, if we ask for nothing but what is good ; i. e. for nothing but what God can bestow with honor, and to our real advantage. “ Open wide thy mouth, (says he,) and I will fill it.” As a good father would not give his son a serpent when he asked for a fish ; a scorpion for an egg, or a stone for bread : so neither would he give him a serpent or a scorpion, even though the child should foolishly request it. Nor will God grant the improper and hurtful desires of his own children. Therefore, let us examine what is good, consult the divine word, and thence learn what to ask : and may we enlarge our desires after the supreme good !

While the worldling drinks in happiness, if it will bear the name, with the mouth of an insect, the Christian imbibes bliss as with the mouth of an angel. His pleasures are the same in kind, with the pleasures of the infinitely happy God.

XXV.

THE APPARENT VANITY OF MAN.

PSALM lxxxix. 47.

Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain ?

It may be difficult to determine at what time this Psalm was made. Ethan and Heman are mentioned as cotemporary with Solomon ; 1 Kings iv. 31. 1 Chron. xv. 19. and as eminent for wisdom, though not equal to him. This Ethan might survive that monarch, and compose this Psalm after his death, when the ten tribes revolted from Rehoboam, and Shishak plundered Jerusalem. Or a person of the same name might write it after the death of Josiah, or nearer the captivity.

Be that as it may, this sentence contains a passionate exclamation, expressing such sensations as the Psalmist would not mean to justify; which yet may afford us instruction, when we examine into the *occasion* of them, as well as when we seek after an *antidote* to rectify them.

FIRST, Let us investigate the *ground* of this complaint; or say, what circumstances seem calculated to tempt a wise and good man to indulge an apprehension that all men are made in vain?

The consideration of *the shortness and uncertainty of human life* in general, is one occasion of this suspicion. Two thirds die under two years of age, and how many more in childhood! How few comparatively reach old age! How soon is the longest life past! How uncertain is every moment! No circumstances can insure it! How much of life is filled with troubles! How much more with trifles! Ah! how vain is this mortal life! If this were all, man would indeed seem to have been made in vain.

Yet how evidently is this world all that most men pursue! Who are they, that comparatively mind any thing else! Though they that possess the most of temporal good, evidently set their minds upon a thing of nought, which may leave them, and which they soon must leave. While others mind no future state; though one would think their troubles here must so embitter this world as to constrain them to look out for a better. Many are busy in doing nothing; many in doing worse than nothing. Some are weaving spiders' webs, others hatching cockatrices' eggs. Many torment themselves; many are a plague to others. And they regard no warning; but seem willing to risque their future portion with devils, if they may but in this life live like beasts.

The great mixture of hypocrites with sincere professors of religion, may induce a pious man to employ this language. In all ages there have been a number who have professed a regard to God, and a future state; but even among those whose professions have been founded on divine revelation, too many have plainly shown themselves to be hypocrites or self-deceivers, and others have at least given ground for suspicion

of their sincerity ; so that God has been greatly dishonored, and religion wounded by its pretended friends.

The imperfection and incapacity of those that are truly upright, may also prompt to this complaint. They that have given the best evidence of sincerity, have for the most part had but little power or influence over others ; or have exerted it to little purpose. Some have discovered occasional blemishes and inconsistencies. All have been too defective in a wise and well regulated zeal ; have not had opportunity to do many things they wished ; and yet missed many opportunities they did enjoy, and should have improved.

The little success of good men in serving God and their generation, is a just ground of lamentation ; and the unhappy success of others in counter-working them. So we may consider David's exaltation to the throne, and Solomon's succession. How soon was the scene beclouded by Solomon's declension, and Rehoboam's misconduct ! How short the duration of subsequent reformation by Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah ! How soon the majority returned to idols ! How soon was the primitive church infected by errors ! How soon were errors revived after the reformation ! What declensions have followed subsequent revivals of religion ! Let us,

SECONDLY, Attempt the *refutation* of this complaint.—Whatever good men have said or thought in a melancholy hour, it must not be left as a charge upon God, that he has actually made all men in vain, nor indeed any man.

Though man appears such a short-lived insect, yet he is really an immortal creature. This life is only an introduction and preparation for a future and eternal state. Nor will any who were here prepared for unchangeable felicity, complain that this mutable state was so short and transitory. It is probable that great part of the inhabitants of heaven never knew much of sorrow.

Those indeed who live to be capable of moral action, give sad evidence of their native unfitness for final happiness ; but the Holy Scriptures teach us that this is the consequence of man's having fallen from the state in which he was created. And God must not be blamed for the consequences

of man's sin. He forbade it. He put the strongest motives against it in his way. He did every thing but prevent it by immediate efficiency. He could have done that indeed ; but to say, that he was *bound* to do so, is inconsistent with moral government.

Were mankind left universally in guilt and misery, God might glorify his justice in their punishment, and teach other intelligent creatures to realize more sensibly and affectingly their dependance on God for happiness, and the evil of rebelling against him. Nor do we know how small a proportion the whole human race may bear, to the intelligent creation throughout the universe.

But we have more pleasing proof that God has *not* made all men *in vain*. He has a different end to answer, with respect to a vast multitude of the human race, and will in the issue get himself more glory from their redemption, than would have arisen from the absolute prevention of evil. Nor is it improbable that a large proportion of the human race will enjoy eternal felicity.

There is a real and essential difference between the inward disposition of some men and of others, and this will be made apparent at the great day, so as to stop the mouth of every enemy for ever.

It shall then appear, that God had a people whom he formed for himself, to show forth his praise ; who really longed for that perfection in holiness, which they shall then attain, and who hated and mourned over those evils, which others willingly indulged. It will then appear that those who perish, cherished the very seeds of hell in their bosoms.

And that those who are saved, were in fact, the only people in the world who loved heaven, and chose to go there for the sake of those things which truly constitute its blessedness.

Even the imperfections and defects of believers shall serve to evince more clearly, that their salvation was all of sovereign grace, and that they were infinitely indebted to the Saviour and the Sanctifier.

God has not made all men in vain ; for it will be found that though good men have died, and left much unfinished, which they intended to have done for God ; yet they had finished

the part which he had allotted them. He raises up a succession of servants ; and while he can do without the greatest, he will not let the weakest go unrewarded. Thus, also, though Satan has formed different schemes, and has used innumerable efforts, to counterwork the divine counsels ; yet it is impossible for him to destroy one elect soul, much less can his art and malice overthrow the cause of God. The

Lord will at last separate all hypocrites from the assembly of his people, who will be for ever united together in holy love, in a state of perfect purity and bliss.

It shall fully appear that God hath not made all men in vain, when the bodies of the saints shall be raised from their graves, and changed into the likeness of the glorified body of their Lord. “ Then shall be brought to pass that saying, Death is swallowed up in victory.” God will get himself glory at last on all his enemies ; but his real friends shall glorify and enjoy him for ever.

May we be enabled constantly to regard the future state, and those invisible, eternal realities, without which all men must have been made in vain, and without a constant regard to which, we must live in vain. May we especially love

and embrace that gospel, without which we must have been made in vain as to all personal enjoyment ; and could only have answered the end of existence passively, by the greatness of our misery.

Let it be our earnest concern not to live in vain now ; especially if we have room to believe that God has glorified himself in our salvation.

If God had not been made man, yea, and made a curse for us, all men would have been made in vain, for any good they could have enjoyed. If the incarnate Son of God had not sustained the curse, we must all have lain under it for ever. The incarnation of the Son of God is the surest pledge that all men were not made in vain. Neither Aaron nor his sons were suffered to continue by reason of death ; but *he* is “ a priest for ever.” Moses and the prophets are dead ; David and his sons are dead ; but “ *he* shall reign for ever.”

If, then, we are interested in this great and everlasting salvation, “ what manner of persons ought we to be, in all

holy conversation and godliness!" Oh may we live, "not to ourselves, but to him that died and rose again!"

Alas! how little does it yet appear to what purpose Christians were made, redeemed, and created anew in Christ Jesus! And as to the generality of mankind, how evidently do they neglect and contradict the true end of their existence! Though God will one day wipe off the reproach such persons cast upon him, and show that he has not made any man in vain; yet how many live really in vain, as to any intentional good they do! And how will *they* hope in vain for any substantial enjoyment, who never made one effort to glorify God, who never earnestly sought to enjoy him! As sordid selfishness excludes in them all real love to God and their fellow-creatures, so it will be found they have counteracted their own interest, while they have thus attempted to secure it, in a way which was neither subordinate to the glory of God, nor connected with the interests of their fellow-men.

XXVI.

THE BEAUTY OF THE DIVINE IMAGE.

Ps. xc. 17.

And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.

THIS Psalm, which is very solemn and impressive, apart from the consideration of the peculiar circumstances in which it was composed, is rendered much more so when we advert to its author and his situation. The whole, however, admits of a very proper application to the case of others, and the prayer in the text is very fit to be used by all who regard the honor of religion, and the welfare of the church of God.

See here the great privilege of access to the throne of grace. That we are not only authorized to apply to God for temporal and external blessings; but for those also which are spiritual and internal. Not only do we need pardon, but sanctification; and God can impart not only spiritual enjoyments arising from a sense of his favor, but those gracious

influences which can conform us to his image. God alone can make us like God. This the true saint desires for himself, and for others also. While others wish for the things which perish with the using, or regard only an escape from punishment, saints long to enjoy God, and to glorify him; to be made like him, and to act for him. As in the text, two principal things are desired:

FIRST, The lively impression of God's beautiful image.

There is a great beauty in true holiness. It is the beauty of the Lord our God, which shines forth in every exhibition of his character, and to which all real saints desire to be conformed more and more. Nothing on earth is so lovely; yea, nothing in heaven. This is what makes saints and angels lovely, and the more of it we possess the more lovely we are.

Is not love to God a beautiful thing? Is not the contrary disposition odious and detestable; rendering the moral character of a rational creature deformed and monstrous? How ugly is ingratitude to a benefactor! to a parent! to God! How lovely is it to love him, not only for his benefits, but for his excellence and beauty! Ex. xv. 11. Zech. ix. 17.

What beauty is there in all holy, lively affections! hope, spiritual peace, love, joy, gratitude, delight in God, trust, dependance, and resignation. What beauty in humility! how becoming a saved sinner! There is great beauty in a truly devotional spirit, in humble prayer, in grateful praise; in regular attendance on the duties of the closet and the sanctuary, with evident marks of sincerity and fervor.

There is great beauty in a benevolent spirit toward men, regarding the rights of others, as we would our own, and treating their welfare as truly important. Regarding their spiritual interests according to their importance; longing for their eternal salvation; and to that end wishing to promote the diffusion of religious knowledge, and recommend the Saviour to all that need him; which is universally the case with our fellow-men. If this be sincere, we shall also be glad to alleviate the present distresses of others, and to promote their present comfort; be careful not to injure them, or needlessly to pain them. Is there not a beauty in brotherly love? Or, in cordial union with others, on

account of their attachment to Christ, and conformity to him? delighting in the graces of our fellow-saints? in honor preferring others, as better than ourselves; not contending who shall be greatest, but rather who shall be least, and the servant of all? desiring to see all professors grow exceedingly in grace, and enjoy and glorify God, more than we have ever yet attained ourselves? Is there not a

great beauty in family order, and a regular discharge of relative duties? Walking together as fellow-heirs of life? Parents bringing up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; not provoking their passions by indulgence of our own? Commanding children and servants to fear the Lord; laboring to set a good example; children obeying parents; servants not acting as eye-servants, but as those who serve the Lord Christ? O how beautiful if all

professors could be distinguished by their purity, sobriety, diligence, heavenly-mindedness, strict veracity, fidelity, punctuality, &c. How beautiful a thing is consistency of conduct; and a due proportion in all our religious affections. Not one duty jostling out another. Not one supposed grace separate from another; but a blessed conjunction of faith and repentance; holy love and holy fear; confidence in Christ and humility; guarding against all extremes; moroseness and sinful compliances; firmness in adherence to duty, and readiness to oblige others when it can be done without sin.

What a beauty in holy activity; laying ourselves out to do good, honoring God with our substance, acting as stewards for him, imitating his beneficence, abounding in every good work.

How beautiful is patience, submission, resignation, readiness to bear the cross, constancy, and passive fortitude; enduring "as seeing Him who is invisible."

How beautiful is separating from the world, and acting as strangers and pilgrims bound for a better country. Let us pray for this beauty of the Lord to be upon us. And also,

SECONDLY, For diligence and success in his blessed service.

The seat of religion is in the heart; but every lovely temper must influence the life, though not always obvious to every one's view. He that loves God and delights in him, will

have much to do for God, and will feel his constant need of assistance in his service, and that he alone can make our attempts successful.

Israel was soon to enter Canaan, and had to expect a severe conflict; and when they should fully possess the land, much was to be done for God there. They were to keep up his worship, mind his institutions, act as his witnesses, and beware of their idolatrous neighbours.

We also have much to do, and need God to establish the work of our hands. Not merely that he should put it into the power of our hands to get wealth, but help us to glorify him in using it.

Ministers have much work to do, and need that you should help them by your prayers; for without Christ they can do nothing.

And surely you would not wish to let them serve alone; you would be willing to co-operate with them. You may greatly promote their endeavors to spread the gospel; second their counsels by your private conversation, by your consistent walk, by showing the influence of the gospel.

Church members have much to do, besides merely celebrating the death of Christ together. Strengthen each other's hands in God. Pray more *with*, as well as *for* one another. Watch over each other in love. Restore those who are overtaken with a fault. Many of you may help other churches by occasional aid. You may help to do good to those who live on the other side of the globe. While others hope to *get* good by intercourse with foreign lands; be it your ambition to *do* good.

XXVII.

THE FOLLY OF IRRELIGION.

PSALM xciv. 8.

Ye fools, when will ye be wise?

I HOPE none of my hearers will be offended at my proposing to discourse from such a text. I certainly cannot mean to apply it to them, indiscriminately; for I rejoice in a persuasion that many of them are wise unto salvation: and though I dare not extend that hope to all, yet I shall not

presume to except any one individually. There are, however, persons who come occasionally into all our places of worship, who never paid a due attention to religion ; and with these we would sometimes expostulate, as earnestly concerned for their eternal welfare. Nor would we address them in the language of contempt, but of tender solicitude for their salvation. For while *worldly* wisdom may make those who possess it, willing to engross and monopolize it, *heavenly* wisdom will ever teach us to long that others may be as wise as ourselves.

But since many who are strangers to true religion will dispute the Christian's claim to the possession of wisdom, and are ready to charge *them* with folly ; let us, therefore, examine,

FIRST, Whether this language can be justly addressed by the irreligious to the friends of evangelical religion ?

Will any account us fools, for owning the existence of a God ? Would it be more rational to attribute the existence of the universe to chance, or to some unintelligent cause ? Should we be happier without the idea of a God ? Are we fools for admitting the extent of Divine Providence, and its uncontrollable powers ? Can it be proved a wiser opinion than ours, that the Creator of the universe cannot manage the creatures he has called into existence ? or that we have no reason to believe that he will give himself any concern about them ? Are we fools for allowing and maintaining the doctrine of God's moral government and human responsibility ? Surely if God has no regard to our conduct, it cannot be proved he has any regard to our happiness. Is it a sign of folly to believe a revelation from God to be desirable, needful, and possible ; and actually contained in the Sacred Scriptures ? Call us fools, if you will ; we will not part with the Bible, till you can show us a better book, and one more worthy of God. Are we fools, for having any desire to know the will of God ? or to understand the full extent of our duty ? Would it be more rational to own the Bible inspired, and yet never attend to its contents ? Are we to be set down as fools for regarding our duty to God himself ? for reverencing, loving, and obeying him ? acknowledging him

alone to be God? for being exact in worshipping him, revering his name? Was Boyle a fool for making a slight pause before he pronounced it? or are they wiser who use it as an interjection? Are we fools for attending to our duty to our neighbour? for doing to *you* as we could wish you to do to us? for honesty, kindness, compassion, chastity, sobriety, and truth? for suppressing all inordinate desires? Are we fools for repenting of our sins? for confessing them to God? loathing and forsaking them, and never remembering them but with self-abhorrence? Are we fools for embracing the gospel of Christ? for believing God's testimony concerning his Son? for resting with complacency in a way of salvation which excludes all boasting; and shows God's righteousness in the act of forgiveness, while it effectually constrains to new obedience? Are we fools for believing an atonement necessary? and such an atonement sufficient? for depending entirely on Christ, admiring his love, and devoting ourselves to him? Are we fools for valuing communion with God? loving his ordinances, and attending to heartfelt religion? Are we fools for joining such a low, despicable set? But why despicable? Does Christ despise them? Do angels despise them? Are we fools for separating from the world? for not taking delight in ensnaring amusements? Are we fools for preferring heaven to earth? Or for seeking the salvation of others, and laboring to promote it, at home and abroad? even if it should cost us ten pounds per annum, or twenty, or fifty, or more? Is that man a bigger fool who gives this to save souls, than he who gives it to a horserace, or loses it at a gaming table; or who lays it up in a chest, or in the stocks, treasured up against the last day, when it shall be a testimony against him, and "eat his flesh as with fire"? Will any man who glorified God with his substance, tax his folly at the resurrection, and reflect thus—'Alas! several hundreds of those who now stand at the left hand of the Judge, would have thought better of me formerly, if I had spent less of my fortune on those who now surround me on his right hand! Surely I died as a fool dieth; for had it not been for religion, I might have died worth twenty thousand pounds; whereas

now all those who were my neighbors on earth know I left but ten thousand!?'? But it is now time to inquire,

SECONDLY, Whether consistent professors of evangelical religion may not justly apply this question to them that neglect or oppose it?

Certainly, if religious people are not downright fools, the irreligious must be chargeable with extreme folly. I hope all present will admit that he is a fool, who says in his heart, "*There is no God;*" who supposes the universe had no author, or that his whole body and soul had no maker.

Nor can I think the *Deist*, who rejects divine revelation, to be much wiser than the *Atheist*. Such may have a high conceit of their own understanding; but when I think what mere reason ever did for ancient heathens, and what it does for modern heathens, or even for *Deists* themselves, I cannot but apply to those who are disposed to reject the Bible, this interrogation—"Ye fools, when will ye be wise?"

May we not address this question to the *neglecters of religion*, who admit the truth of Christianity, and yet are not anxious to be interested in Christ, but go on carelessly and inconsiderately, minding only earthly things, instead of the one thing needful.

We may apply it also to the *self-righteous*, who expect to obtain justification by the works of the law, which they have violated, and who go about to establish their own righteousness.

To the *procrastinator*, who admits it is needful to attend to religion, yet is ever putting it off to some more convenient season. Just as if repentance would be easier the longer it was delayed; or as if religion were a disagreeable, but necessary medicine, which no one need use, till at the point of death.

We may apply the interrogation to the *hypocrite* and *self-deceiver*, who either knowingly imposes on others, or fatally deludes himself. Remember, God cannot be deceived, and will not be mocked.

The man who pretends to serve *God* and *Mammon*, may be included under the last class. Certainly, at the end he will be found a fool. Our Lord declares that no man can serve two masters, that no one can be his disciple who does not leave all and follow him.

O! let us bless God if he has made us wise ; and pity, pray for, and expostulate with others.

If any man begins to perceive his lack of wisdom, let "him ask of God who giveth liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him."

XXVIII.

GOD THE SUPREME GOVERNOR.

PSALM xcvi. 1.

The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice ; let the multitudes of isles be glad thereof.

THOUGH the fool hath said in his heart, There is no God ; and though the carnal heart is unwilling to realize and submit to his government ; yet every wise and good man will rejoice in his highness, and be thankful that his kingdom extends over all. Therefore the Psalmist looked forward with ineffable delight to the period when his authority should be acknowledged all over the earth, and the most distant coasts should exult in the extent of his spiritual kingdom. Let us consider the nature, extent, and happy consequences of his government.

FIRST : He reigns in the natural world.

And is it not desirable that he should do so ? or had you rather embrace the idea that all things around you sprang from the fortuitous concourse of senseless atoms, which may be again disorganized by some new turn of chance, than ascribe creation to an intelligent first cause ? And had you rather trust to chance, or fate, or nature, for protection and preservation through life, and for all possible expectation of conscious existence after death, than to the will of a Supreme Intelligence ? There is strong proof that some wide extended catastrophe has formerly overwhelmed this globe. Had you rather believe that a number of floods have taken place accidentally, without God, than admit that Jehovah once destroyed mankind by a deluge, but has promised that he will do so no more ? Do you like better to suppose such an event may take place in your time, without any intention to punish sin ?

Are you willing that more partial calamities should be ascribed to some inferior cause, or do you wish for no protector superior to yourself? Surely, believers in revelation have ground to rejoice in the existence of one glorious Being, who superintends all he has created. We have no other security for continued seasons, nor for the limitation of natural disorders; no safety by land or sea. But winds and waves, lightnings and earthquakes, are controlled by him; pestilential disorders are limited by him; yea, individuals are noticed by him. He can control the laws of nature, or withhold so interfering; he can preserve you. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without him. How much better to be at the disposal of infinite intelligence, combined with infinite goodness, than to be left to shift for yourself amidst jarring elements, controlled by no superior being!

I rejoice that Jehovah reigneth, and should regret that I ever came into existence, if I thought there was no God. I shall not enlarge on the comparison between Jehovah and false gods. None of you would prefer a multitude of inferior gods, whose moral characters should resemble those which heathens ascribe to objects of their worship; partial, passionate, envious, cruel, subjects of every vile affection and hateful passion which can disgrace men. We are glad they are banished from Europe. May God utterly abolish them from the earth!

SECONDLY: He reigns over intelligent creatures, so as to control all their operations, notwithstanding their rebellion and disorder.

The most depraved of free agents are under his absolute control. He can check or restrain them in a thousand unknown ways; setting bounds to their outrageous passions, and frustrating their daring designs. He can cause those whose inclinations are most opposed to his holy purposes to subserve his own intentions; so that "the wrath of man shall praise him, and the remainder of wrath will he restrain." This will hold good, both on the smallest scale and on the largest. When Esau sought to slay Jacob, God delivered him not into his hands. He protracted the life of Isaac; preserved Jacob in Mesopotamia; and when he returned, caused

Esau to lay aside his murderous purpose. He restrained the Canaanites from revenging on Jacob's family the cruelty of Simeon and Levi towards the Shechemites. When Joseph's brethren envied and hated him, they were not suffered to take away his life; but, by selling him to those who carried him into Egypt, became instruments of fulfilling the prophetic dreams they meant to frustrate. The like might be said of the revenge of Potiphar's wife. Thus the worst individuals are under divine control. Shimei could go no farther, in showing his malice against David, than was permitted for his farther humiliation by God, who utterly frustrated the counsel of Ahitophel, a far more formidable foe. So God had before preserved him from the machinations of Saul. Ps. xxxvii. 32, 33. And as to more extensive and public calamities, inflicted by man upon man—the horrid scourge of war, in which one party must always be wrong, and in which both are generally exceedingly guilty; and though good men have seldom had power to prevent the unjust or imprudent measures of their rulers, yet they are liable to be involved in the awful consequences; still it is ground of joy that the Lord reigns. While the authors of the contest indulge their evil passions and animosities, God can overrule the distress of nations for the good of his people, and will be their refuge in time of trouble. He has often used those who hated his people for their attachment to him, to correct their lukewarmness and other sinful defects, and stir them up to fervent prayer. The Assyrian was the rod of God's anger, The divine indignation was the staff in his hands; “howbeit he meant not so, neither did his heart think so: but it was in his heart to destroy nations not a few.” But though the sinners in Zion were afraid, yet the Lord was the confidence of Hezekiah, who spake comfortably to the people. 2 Chron. xxxii. 7, 8. The sword cannot come upon a land without a divine permission; and let the motive of the instruments be ever so bad, God's design is right, wise, and good; though this is no excuse for them that delight in war. But he can stop the progress of the most powerful foes at his pleasure; like Sennacherib: and we have another example in modern times. Or he can cause them to treat his people well in

the day of calamity ; Jeremiah, Daniel, &c. He knows the end from the beginning. He inspired Daniel to foretel the rise and fall of four monarchies. The machinations and contests of the Ptolemies in Egypt (*the king of the south.*)—And that of the Seleucidæ in Syria (*the king of the north.*)—The division of the Roman empire into ten kingdoms. The rise of the Popedom ; (*the little horn of the fourth beast.*) And of the Turks (*the little horn of the goat.*) His plan is laid in consummate wisdom, and shall terminate in the universal establishment of the kingdom of his Son. He exercises a moral government over intelligent creatures, subjection to which would insure their happiness. All the misery of man results from his attempt to cast off the divine yoke ; or from transgressing the divine law, which is summed up in the word LOVE ; and would unite all our race together, by uniting them first to God as the centre of the moral world. “ Love worketh no ill to his neighbor.” Love bringeth no mischief on man. To love God is a privilege, as well as a duty ; and surely God is good in requiring all men to love you, and cannot be otherwise in requiring you to love them. And now, though man has rebelled against God, yet God and his throne are guiltless ; nor will he abdicate his throne, nor abate his law ; but has fixed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness. To every good being this is ground of rejoicing ; and though to sinners it is just ground of alarm, yet it ought not to be of complaint ; nor can they excuse their disaffection. But

THIRDLY, He has set up a spiritual government, or a kingdom of grace over renewed souls ; and will in his own time cause it to extend over all the earth.

In this, above all, have we reason to rejoice. Grace reigns, not on the ruins of righteousness, but through righteousness unto eternal life. The seat of this kingdom is internal. Happy is every one in whose heart it is set up : for it consists in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. God, however, did not send his Son to betray his government, and compromise with rebels by repealing the law which offended them. He sent his Son to vindicate and establish his holy law ; and while he redeemed them from the curse they had deserved, to bring them back to the

obedience of the same law from which they had revolted. "He died the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God." When this kingdom is set up in the soul, the natural, providential, and moral government of God will appear infinitely desirable. The believer will rejoice in God's highness, and consider it a happy thing for all events to be at his disposal, and all creatures under his control. And he will long for others to become his willing subjects, and for him to reign from shore to shore. This is the kingdom foretold by Daniel. ii. 35. 44, 45. vii. 27. It is begun, and it must increase.

The consummation of God's word approaches. The Western isles have been made to rejoice, and the farthest isles of the East shall soon partake of the joy. Blessed is every individual in whose heart it is erected ; but when it extends universally, wars shall cease to the ends of the earth. The creatures shall no longer be abused and subject to vanity ; but the creation shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, in the glorious liberty of the sons of God. We need not fear lest God should reign too absolutely. His understanding is infinite ; his perfections are unsullied with a single blemish ; his plan is perfect, and he will execute infallibly. Immense advantages shall result, even to superior beings that never sinned ; and all the awful consequences of rebellion shall be removed from the saved, and confined to the finally impenitent, who would not that Christ should reign over them, and would not come unto him for life.

XXIX.

THE DESIRABLENESS OF A SPIRITUAL TASTE.

PSALM cxix. 66.

Teach me good judgment and knowledge : for I have believed thy commandments.

THE subject proposed for our consideration this evening is *the desirableness of a spiritual taste*. Before I enter directly on this subject, you will allow me to remark that there is no part of the divine word in which the peculiar feelings of a

gracious soul are more fully described than in this 119th Psalm. They that are strangers to them themselves, are apt to conceive of them as if they must needs be unpleasant and disagreeable; but there is nothing essential to true religion, which those who have once experienced it, do not desire to experience again, and that in a higher degree.

He that possesses the greatest measure of true holiness will think the lowest of his present attainments, and be most poor in spirit; and he that has most purity of heart will most hunger and thirst after righteousness. Even repentance itself, (abating the dread and anxiety which usually attend its commencement,) will be sure to excite those who truly experience it, to desire it may be constantly felt, as long as sin has any existence in the soul.

Nothing is a more certain criterion by which we may distinguish true grace from its counterfeits. He who loves God most, will long to love him more; he that most mortifies sin, will long to mortify it more; he that truly most reveres God, will wish to abide in his fear all the day long; he whose conscience is faithful and tender, will long for it to be more so. But the hypocrite wishes for as little zeal, fear, sorrow for sin, and self-denial, as ever will serve the turn he would have it to answer.

David, who discovers a holy taste, (Ps. xix. 10. civ. 34. cxix. 109.) and recommended it to others, (xxxiv. 8.) requests in our text to have it increased. For the word rendered *judgment*, properly signifies *taste*, and denotes that relish for divine truth, and for the divine goodness and holiness, which is peculiar to true saints. I propose therefore to consider,

FIRST, The nature and objects of that spiritual taste, which is possessed by every gracious soul, and which all true saints desire to possess in a still greater degree.

The original word, which is often applied to those objects of sense which are distinguished by the palate, is here used in a metaphorical sense, as the corresponding term frequently is in our own language. "Doth not the ear try words, and the mouth taste meat?" Job xii. 11. Our translators, in this place, render it *judgment*, which is nearly the same thing; yet as the terms are applied among us, there is a difference

between them. Taste is that which enables a man to form a more compendious judgment. Judgment is slower in its operations than taste: it forms its decisions in a more circuitous way. So we apply the term *taste* to many objects of mental decision, to the beauty of a poem, to excellence of style, to elegance of dress or of deportment, to painting, to music, &c. in which a good taste will lead those who possess it, to decide speedily, and yet accurately, on the beauty, excellence, and propriety of the objects with which it has long been conversant, without laborious examination.

Just so, true saints have a power of receiving pleasure from the beauty of holiness, which shines forth resplendently in the word of God, in the divine character, in the law, in the gospel, in the cross of Christ, in the example of Christ, and in the conduct of all his true followers, so far as they are conformed to his lovely image. I do not mean by this, that they are influenced by a blind instinct, for which they can assign no sufficient reason: the genuine feelings of a true Christian can all of them be justified by the soundest reason: but those feelings, which were first produced by renewing grace, are so strengthened by daily communion with God, and by frequent contemplation of spiritual things, that they acquire a delicacy and readiness of perception, which no one can possess who has never tasted how gracious the Lord is. You cannot touch, as it were, a certain string, but the renewed heart must needs answer to it. Whatever truly tends to exalt God, to bring the soul near to him, and to insure his being glorified and enjoyed, will naturally attract the notice of one who is born of God, excite his affections, and influence his conduct. “Sweeter also than honey, and the honeycomb.” “My meditation of thee shall be sweet.” “How sweet are thy words to my taste, beyond honey to my mouth.” “O taste and see that the Lord is good.” Consider,

SECONDLY: The influence of a rectified spiritual taste on our increasing acquaintance with divine truth.—“Teach me good taste, (judgment) and knowledge.”

It was said of him to whom the Holy Spirit was given without measure, “It shall make him of good understanding

in the fear of Jehovah." Now the same effect will follow, in a proportionate degree, if we imbibe the same spirit in a subordinate measure : and this spirit will lead us into all the truth, as it is in Jesus.

It will excite our ready attention to every discovery that God makes of himself. We shall love to see God in every thing ; in all his works, and in his holy word.

We shall submissively yield to his wisdom, and bow implicitly to the decisions of divine revelation, expecting to find that God knows much better than we.

We shall show a disposition congenial with the truth, cordially coinciding with the end for which revelation is made.

We shall the more readily enter into the genuine import of his word. Not aspiring to be as gods, knowing good and evil. But let the Lord alone be exalted, and let man be laid low.

He that loves for God to be glorified, will of course find that those representations of the divine character suit his taste, which tend most to answer that blessed end.

One that loves dependance and subjection will readily admit, and cordially receive, those ideas which bind us most closely to God, and tend to humble us in the dust before him.

He that loves universal order, harmony, and purity, will readily fall in with those representations which promote holiness, and are suited to excite the greatest abhorrence of sin.

He that detests sin, and wants to return to God and be re-admitted to his favor, in such a way as shall not dishonor him, will be delighted with salvation through the great Mediator, and count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of him, and be pleased with those ideas of him, which magnify his love and endear him to the soul.

He whose heart is filled with Christian benevolence will delight in contemplating the image of Christ, wherever he can discern it. He will recognize the family likeness, impressed on all true saints, and readily coincide with all that tends to increase holy union, and to gratify disinterested benevolence.

A man of a heavenly taste will relish those representations which tend most to elevate the soul above the world, and to attract it powerfully toward celestial objects.

Hence we infer, that nothing can equal a holy, rectified

taste, in its tendency to promote the knowledge of the truth, whether as to sentiment or practice. Consider,

THIRDLY: The ground of this earnest desire after an increasing spiritual taste and more spiritual knowledge.

It naturally results from a full conviction already received of the supreme authority of God, and the equity of all his commandments. "I have believed thy commandments." As if he should say, 'I am sure thou hast a right to command. I am sure all thy commandments are right. I am sure it is my interest to obey them; and that there is more to be gained by keeping them, than can ever be got by transgressing them.' "In keeping them there is great reward."

If we believe God's commands to be just, we shall not be surprised at the sanction being rigorously enforced; and, if we believe sin to be so great an evil as the sanction of the law implies, we shall readily admit that salvation is of grace; and shall not wonder that God should refuse to forgive sins without a Mediator who could atone for it by a most costly sacrifice; that Infinite Wisdom alone would choose one fit for this purpose, "having laid help upon one that is mighty and able to save to the uttermost;" and that he cannot, by thus releasing us from obligation to punishment, have relaxed our obligations to obedience.

How earnestly then should we apply to God for an increase of this holy taste, and consequently of spiritual knowledge! This will enable you much more speedily, exactly, and certainly, to determine what is true and right, than any laborious investigation of an unholy man. Yet this will not set aside the use of the sacred scriptures; but will enable us more speedily and correctly to apply its rules, or lead us at once to act agreeably to them, while its decisions will bear to be examined most rigorously by them. But a sanctified taste will assist us wonderfully in interpreting the word of God. 'Does it tend to God's glory? or, though not forbidden expressly, is it acting like Christ?'

First, A plain unlettered man, with a spiritual taste, will judge far better of divine things, than a man of superior powers, or of superior education or attainments, without it. Such a one, in proportion to his capacity, will increase in

knowledge. And what he knows by taste, may be justified by scriptural arguments, though he may not be able, in all cases, to state those arguments himself; like the poor martyr who said, "I cannot dispute for Christ, but I can die for him." He is sure his gospel is suited to his wants; it tends to fill his conscience with peace and pleasure, and to fill his soul with purity, and to influence him powerfully to new obedience.

Secondly, Whatever tends to inflate the mind with self-sufficiency, to draw it off from constant and entire dependance on Christ, or to reconcile the soul to sin, will be at once perceived to be of a most injurious tendency. Whatever would lessen our reverence and esteem for God, or prevent our delight in him, and our communion with him, and hinder our conformity to him, will naturally be shunned by those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. By them, nothing will be counted good that draws them off from God; nothing evil that brings them nearer to God.

Thirdly, They that are truly led by the Spirit of God, are certainly his children: and all that are born of God are thus led. Not by any new revelation, but by his sanctifying influence on the soul; which leads them justly to interpret his word, and to acquiesce in its humbling and holy discoveries. There is a most harmonious agreement between the dictates of God's word, and the disposition of a renewed mind.

A good spiritual taste will distinguish things that differ, and prefer those that are more excellent.

XXX.

THE PROGRESS OF IMPIETY.

PROV. i. 22.

How long; ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity; and the scorers delight in their scorning; and fools hate knowledge?

THOUGH the words I have now read are the words of wisdom, yet there are some professors in the world, who aim

so much at being wise above what is written, that they would hardly endure for a minister to expostulate with sinners after the same manner. I rejoice that you, my beloved friends, have not so learned Christ, and I trust you will help me by your prayers, while I endeavour to reason with the inconsiderate part of my auditory, and plead the cause of God with them that have not yet submitted to his holy claims. I well know that I shall address them in vain, unless he opens their hearts to receive instruction; for though it is my duty to enforce the call of God as earnestly as if I had only to trust to my own powers, yet I would depend as entirely on him as if I were commissioned to prophesy to dry bones. While I request the prayers of God's people for success, let me, in the most affectionate manner, conjure those who have hitherto neglected religion, to give me their attention while I,

FIRST, Illustrate the description.—A climax may be observed in the expressions, which justly delineates the progress of impiety.

First, Many are *simple*, and they *love simplicity*. They give themselves up to thoughtless inconsideration. The sinner does not love to think of divine things, of God, of duty, of death, and the world to come; of things that may restrain his appetites and sensual inclinations. These are things that may make him uneasy, or occasion his being laughed at. He loves to be thought good-natured by his bad acquaintance; he loves to gratify his tempters, and to be gratified himself, by such lying vanities as may call off his mind from God. He would be like others, and so follows bad precedents, though they are really the children of the wicked one. He begins to imitate them, even in things wherein they can urge no plea of either profit or pleasure; such as prophaning the name of God. He begins to think those to be his enemies, or at least to be over rigid and too particular, who would restrain him. He begins to be ashamed of the appearance of religion, to neglect the forms of duty he once respected, and to try to suppress the thoughts that used formerly to restrain him from various sinful practices. Thus he is led on by degrees to a greater distance from God,

and a greater aversion to true religion, till he arrives at the next stage ; and,

Secondly, Ranks among the *scorners*, who *delight in scorn-
ing*. At first he presumes not to ridicule religion himself, but is pleased to hear it done by others ; and after awhile he begins to join them. He begins with noticing the inconsistencies of professors, and their real or apparent defects. Then he charges the faults of individuals on the whole body of professors, insinuating that they are all alike, all hypocrites ; and himself and others, who do not pretend to religion, are much better. At length he derides religion itself, all inward experience, evangelical doctrines, and holy practice. Now he soon reaches the summit and joins,

Thirdly, The *fools*, who *hate knowledge*. He hates to hear the word faithfully preached ; prefers a smoother strain of preaching, that may not disturb his conscience, but afford entertainment to his fancy, while he continues estranged from God, and denies or forgets the most important and most humiliating truths. He is gratified if teachers encourage him to think well of himself without heart-felt religion. If that cannot be obtained, public worship is gradually neglected, and the serious perusal of the scriptures. A sinner in this state of mind, will eagerly listen at objections against the principal doctrines of the Bible, especially against those which are most opposed to the evil bias of his heart, according as he may most incline to the lusts of the flesh or of the mind. Perhaps he will imbibe prejudices against the very existence of the Bible, as a revelation from God, or though seldom attacking the whole at once in a way of argumentation, he will gladly seek for difficulties and apparent contradictions, and cavil at particular facts, doctrines, or precepts. Thus he will soon learn to revile all preachers and professors, especially the most faithful ministers, and the most conscientious and zealous Christians. As far as he can, he will even become a persecutor of them for righteousness' sake, saying all manner of evil against them on account of their religion. Now he becomes an advocate for infidelity and irreligion, labouring to seduce others, and make them as bad as himself. I would now,

SECONDLY, Enforce the expostulation. And now let conscience testify whether I have sketched a just picture of any one present.

Are there none of you so inconsiderate as to live without God in the world? leaving him out of all their thoughts? living to no purpose but to gratify those appetites which they have in common with the beasts that perish? "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?" How long will ye neglect your chief end? Many years have been thus trifled away, and perhaps but few remain; and will you still go on to procrastinate and put off your main business; while one delay is big with another, and that with a train of them, which we fear will last till the blackness of darkness overtake you for ever? You stand in a slippery place; nothing but divine patience keeps you out of hell; and you have no promise that it shall last a day longer. And even if it does, you are likely to get nearer and nearer to hell; to become more and more hardened in sin, and soon to arrive at such an advanced state of impiety, as would now perhaps make you tremble. Now is the accepted time! Now, in your youth, is the time to be saved. Your youthful days may be all that you will see. Oh, beware lest Satan get you soon in the chair of the scoffer. This year you are simple enough to neglect religion; in two or three more you may begin to ridicule it, and at last to persecute it. Beware! I hope there are few or none here that have proceeded to the greatest lengths of infidelity and impiety—if there were I would make my appeal even to them. Are you really happier now than formerly, when you had some restraint laid on you by a religious education? Have you a better standard of morality than Christians? Have you a better prospect beyond the grave? More decisive evidence that there is a future state? that your state will not be miserable, but happy? Have you the knowledge of a plan of remission of sins, more consistent than that in the gospel of Christ? Or more certain aid in the practice of virtue, and more evident preparation for endless bliss? Or, are you snatching at the wretched consolation that there is no futurity, no God, or at least that he exercises no moral government? that he considers you

free from all responsibility, and will never bring you or any one else to judgment? and that death will completely extinguish all conscious existence, and terminate both hopes and fears? Oh wretched! Is this all that infidelity can do for you? But if you are mistaken! If you should find out your mistake when it is too late, and God should fulfil that list of threatenings at the end of the chapter from which the text is taken.....what will you do then?

Oh that you may rather turn at his reproof, and find the accomplishment of the promises; for God hath said, "Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my Spirit upon you, I will make known my words unto you." Amen!

XXXI.

THE PLEASANTNESS OF RELIGION.

PROV. iii. 17.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

THESE words are spoken of wisdom, by which Solomon evidently intends, not that partial sagacity which may be somewhat serviceable in the management of our temporal concerns, but that true wisdom which will direct a man in the pursuit of his chief end, and enable him to secure his eternal interest. For no man who exercises his reason aright can controvert the truth of the first position in the Catechism of the Assembly of Divines, That man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever. Wisdom is therefore the same thing with true religion, or the spiritual, experimental, practical knowledge of God in Christ.

Christ himself seems sometimes immediately intended under this title; especially in the 8th chapter of this book; which is considered by some of the most ancient Christian writers,* and of the most learned modern critics,† as directly referring to the Messiah: to him "in whom are hidden all

* Justin Martyr, in his Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, about the middle of the second century.

† Dr. Campbell.

the treasures of wisdom and knowledge ; who is unto them which are called, (that is, to all who have been influenced by the Spirit to obey the call of the gospel,) Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." He is the subject, the object, and the author of true wisdom ; in whom we have the fullest displays of the divine perfections and counsels ; who by his Holy Spirit imparts that wisdom to the mind, which chiefly consists in the knowledge of himself and of the divine glories, as manifested in his redemption.

It will come to just the same thing, whether we apply the text to Christ himself, or to that true religion, which consists in the knowledge of divine truth, as taught by him, and centering in him.

Nor is it material whether we consider these two clauses as perfectly synonymous, repeating the same truth in different words, to impress it more deeply on the mind ; or whether we suppose the sentiment to be a little diversified.

In both clauses, the plural number is used, to show that the doctrine of the text will hold good in the most extensive sense.

Let us, therefore, take two or three different views of the subject, that we may see how ample an accomplishment it will receive.

FIRST : We may apply it, both to the ways which the wisdom of God has taken to bring sinners to himself, and to the paths in which he has enjoined them to walk before him.

First, Consider what wisdom, beauty, and attractive loveliness are displayed in the purchase of salvation.

Oh ! it was a kind errand on which incarnate wisdom came into this world, to make peace between God and sinners ; and the Saviour has executed his work in a manner fitted to charm our souls. " We have redemption in the Beloved, through his blood, according to the riches of his grace, wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence." How pleasant is it to see the harmony of all the divine perfections, each adding lustre to the rest ! The cross of Christ " magnifies justice in the way of pardoning sin, and mercy in the way of punishing it. It shows justice more awful than if mercy had been excluded, and grace more amiable than if justice had been dispensed with." It

is not on the ruins of righteousness that grace has erected her throne, but grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life. At the Saviour's advent, the admiring angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth, peace, good will toward men." But when the nations of the redeemed are brought together, surely they will strive to out-sing the angelic hosts. When John heard the songs of heaven, before it was half as full as it is now, (and even at present the first-fruits only are gathered, the millennial harvest is yet to come) the sound was like the sound of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, all uniting in praise to the Lamb that was slain, and who redeemed them to God with his blood. Here perishing sinners often cause the ambassadors of peace to weep bitterly, and to exclaim, "Who hath believed our report?" Though "it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," yet many reject the counsel of God against themselves. They despise that Saviour who is altogether lovely. And this is the strongest proof of human depravity, that so many are unwilling to come to him for life. Oh! it must a degraded taste that can prevent a soul from cordially relishing his plan of redemption. They that hate him, seem as if they were in love with death. But "whoso findeth him shall find life, and obtain favor of the Lord." He is "the way, the truth, and the life; no one cometh unto the Father but by him." Oh it is the best, and fittest, and happiest thing in the world, to return to God by him, who hath made peace by the blood of his cross.

Secondly, Consider what wise and winning methods are used by the Holy Spirit in the application of redemption to the soul.

Though sinners are invited indefinitely to apply to the Saviour, and whoever hears the gospel has a full warrant to come to him for salvation; yet pride and self-righteousness, the love of sin and of this present evil world, would destroy all our hopes of success, who are called to perform an embassy for Christ, if it were not for the effectual energy of the Holy Spirit. This alone encourages us to expect that our labor shall not be wholly in vain. But he knows how to

work on the human mind without doing violence to its natural faculties. He draws with the cords of a man, and with bands of love. He circumcises the heart to love the Lord. He fulfils that gracious promise, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you : and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." Then his people become volunteers in the day of his power, in the beauty of holiness. He takes of the things of Christ, and reveals them to the soul ; and then all things are counted as loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. True, he discovers alarming truths, he convinces of sin, of righteousness, and judgment ; he shows the sinner his guilt, danger, and depravity, but he shows also the Saviour's all-sufficiency, suitableness, loveliness, and glory : and then the more sensible the sinner is of his danger, the more does he rejoice in his deliverance ; the more sensible he is of his unworthiness and guilt, the more does he admire the riches of grace, the efficacy of the atonement, and the sovereignty of divine love. Whatever pain attends his new views and exercises of mind, is owing to sin as its proper cause, not to grace ; and the pleasure of his return to God, far counterbalances all the pain of forsaking and mortifying sin.

Thirdly, Consider how pleasant and peaceful are the ways in which saved sinners are directed to draw near to God, and to walk before him, in order to manifest their gratitude to their Saviour, and to honor him before men.

The exercises of piety, love, faith, trust, hope, humility, resignation, and devotedness to God, are all pleasant ; and if ever they are attended with difficulty or pain, this is owing to remaining imperfection. The ordinances of God, which are the appointed means of communion with him, are pleasant, when believers attend upon them in a right manner ; when they pour out their hearts before him, and unite in prayer and praise ; sit down at his feet, and receive each one of them the instruction of his words, which do good to them that walk uprightly ; contemplate his glory, and inquire in his temple, listening to his counsels and his promises ; when they solemnly devote themselves to the Father, the Son, and

the Holy Spirit, being "buried with Christ by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so they also should walk in newness of life;" when they receive the pledges of the Saviour's dying love at his table, and find their hearts united to him and to his people, who are all incorporated in one body, as many grains of wheat or particles of flour are united in one loaf: these social exercises, and sacred ordinances, excite the most delightful emotions of heart, and convince them that the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness.

Our duty to our fellow-men is pleasant also; that is, in proportion to that spirit of disinterested benevolence, without which this duty cannot be performed. Not only is it pleasant to indulge a love of complacency towards all in whom we can recognize the image of Christ; but to show compassion to the ignorant and them that at present are out of the way. How richly does a benevolent soul enjoy the food he gives to the hungry; and how much more delightful is it to be subservient to the salvation of an immortal soul from eternal death! But this leads to another view of the subject.

SECONDLY: We may remark, that true religion will ever be found pleasant to ourselves, acceptable to God, and beneficial to man.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, as they conduce to our own present as well as future happiness. What can be pleasanter, than the exercise of love to the glorious God, enjoying access to him, by a righteous and gracious mediator, rejoicing in his great salvation; devoting ourselves to his service, as conscious that being bought with a price we are not our own? What can be pleasanter, than to depend on the providence of God for all needful supplies of temporal good; casting all our care upon him, as being assured that he careth for us; and that his eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth, that he may show himself strong in behalf of those whose hearts are perfect towards him? What can be so pleasant as to receive all from him, and use all for him? What can be more pleasant than a life of communion with God, living upon Christ both for righteousness and strength; whose declaration shall be as surely fulfilled to us as it was

to the Apostle, "My grace is sufficient for thee"? Is it not pleasant to enjoy beforehand the expectation of endless felicity; to look for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God; and already to lay hold on eternal life?

Surely sobriety, temperance, chastity, and self-government, are a thousand times more pleasant than the lawless indulgence of our appetites and passions? The former will not injure the body, nor harrow up the mind, nor make a man unhappy and melancholy. "Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?" Are these the fruits of humility, and meekness, and temperance? The impure, the intemperate, the self-indulgent, account themselves the votaries of pleasure, but "at the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder."

The more universal and ardent our love is to mankind, the more shall we enjoy the happiness of others, instead of envying it: and if it makes us grieve for their sins and miseries, yet we shall often rejoice in being made the instrument of alleviating the one, and correcting the other. Integrity and veracity will not dishonor our characters, nor burden our consciences. Complacency in good men, and disinterested benevolence to all, will not torment us, like envy and malice, pride and revenge. Generosity and beneficence will not put us to the blush like covetousness and dishonesty; the former will never make us unhappy, and, if guided by wisdom and discretion, will not be likely to make us poorer in the end.

All her paths are peace. To walk in God's paths is acceptable to him. He said to the father of the faithful, "I am God all-sufficient; walk thou before me, and be thou perfect." "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect to all thy commandments," said the Psalmist. "Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. Oh! that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes." Though we can never walk so exactly, but that we may see much that is amiss or defective, which may well convince us that we cannot be justified by our own works; yet Christ is the way, by which we have free access to the Father, and our persons being accepted in him, our duties shall be approved for his

sake. And the more religion rules in the heart, the more uninterrupted will be our communion with God; the more shall we be reconciled to all the dispensations of his providence, and be led to unite with God's wise and gracious design in them; and the more shall we find that all things work together for our good.

Thus only, by walking in wisdom's ways, can a man be self-consistent.* For even self-love will make us condemn that in others, which it leads us to justify in ourselves. Thus the sinner cannot hope to excuse himself, but by the help of some disguise. He must be ashamed of his conduct under its true name. So, on the other hand, religion cannot be reproached, but under a nick name. Who will dare to speak ill of love to God, or of benevolence to man? Who shall censure honesty, truth, humility, or conscientiousness? No, bad men must slander the Christian, before they dare to revile him. His conduct must be distorted, and his principles misrepresented, and his religion called by the name of preciseness, hypocrisy, or some other unjust appellation, or they dare not reproach it.

Religion is not only pleasant to ourselves, but profitable to others. All her paths are peace, as true religion will ever teach us to seek the welfare of our fellow-men, and especially to pursue the promotion of their true and highest interest. Love worketh no ill to our neighbour. It spreads no slanders, excites no quarrels, injures no man's property, disturbs no man's peace; except by reproofing men for their sins, and exhorting them to flee from the wrath to come, which is necessary to preserve them from destruction.

THIRDLY: If you consider the *present tendency* of true religion, its ways are ways of pleasantness; and if you consider its *final issue*, all its paths are peace.

When we consider the immortality of man, and reflect how small a part of his existence is spent in this world, we might well call the practice of religion the path of peace, even if no pleasure attended it at present. But we have already proved, that the case is widely different. Her ways are even now the most pleasant of all ways, and the end of them is peace.

* See Edwards on the Nature of True Virtue. Ch. viii. p. 203. Edin. 1788.

As Dr. Lowth translates Isaiah lv. 12.

Surely with joy shall ye go forth,
And with peace shall ye be led onward.

Of the wicked it is written, "Destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace they have not known." How agreeable soever the path of sin may appear, yet it will be bitterness in the end. Yea, as Solomon repeatedly observes, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Such is the way of the self-righteous, and of every kind of false religion. But the way of Christ is the way to peace, to everlasting rest, to perfect and eternal bliss. To him, in the highest sense, are the following words applicable: "He is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon him: and happy is every one that retaineth him." He is indeed the tree of life that is in the midst of the paradise of God. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace." O my hearers! what a blessing is heavenly peace! Peace on a death-bed! Peace for ever! But before I close, I would answer an objection or two to the doctrine of our text.

First: One may be drawn from the testimony of such as never found any pleasure in religion, or who seem to find but very little.

In answer to this, I would observe, that in order to enjoy the pleasantness of these ways it is necessary to walk in them, to keep in them, yea, to press forward in them. It cannot be known how pleasant they are, by those who never entered upon them, or whose hearts are not in them. A constrained attendance on the forms of religion, whether it be urged upon us by authority, or we are influenced by custom, or excited to it by an uneasy conscience, will be a very dull affair, if we are destitute of heart-felt religious principle. Or if the influence of that principle is feebly felt, our pleasures will be proportionably small. If we have had a slight taste of sacred joy, it will be interrupted if we turn aside from the right way, or if we are not aiming to make progress therein. It is justly affirmed of God's way, they that *run* therein shall *not* be *weary*, the most that is said of those that *walk slowly* is, they shall not *utterly faint*.

Secondly: Another objection is sometimes drawn from the angry disputes that have been carried on respecting religion, and the persecutions that have been raised against it, or as some suppose, have been raised by it.

To this I answer, that our Lord has made it our duty to contend earnestly for the faith, but they go out of his way who do not contend for it with meekness and love. True zeal does not indulge bitterness against the persons of men, though it excites a benevolent opposition to their errors and sins.

Surely religion ought not to be blamed for the opposition of its enemies; nor yet for the misconduct of those that are merely pretenders to it. And as to the miscarriages of its true friends, these are not occasioned by religion itself, but are owing to their want of more of it.

Thirdly: Some may object also, on account of the trials and difficulties to which good men are often exposed.

But these are ordained partly for their correction, and partly for the trial of their faith, and other graces. And those who have endured the greatest measure of afflictions, will testify in the strongest manner that they have found them sweetly counter-balanced. They have found that the Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; he knoweth those that trust in him. If they had never known religion, they would have been equally exposed to various distresses, but they would have been strangers to the supports and consolations they now enjoy under them, and to the peaceful fruits of righteousness which they yield to them.

Of how much importance is it, that we consider our ways. Let us examine if we have been led into the paths of peace, and have found the ways of wisdom pleasant to our souls. Certainly, no such pleasures can be found elsewhere. The pleasures which sinners fancy they experience, are fleeting and transitory; they are delusive, intoxicating, and poisonous; debasing the character of a rational and immortal creature, and ending in everlasting woe.

How then should we bless God for delineating the right way to bliss in his word, and entreat that he would guide our feet into it. Certainly, if we pay any regard to the testimony of the God of truth, we shall conclude, that we cannot enjoy divine pleasure and

heavenly peace too soon, nor can we have too much of it. Yet some, I fear, are near the end of the journey of life, who have never known the way of peace. They have had long experience of the disappointments, miseries, and vexations of the ways of sin, and still they are not wise enough to forsake the foolish and live, and go in the way of understanding. Alas ! you are near the end of life, but can *you* be near heaven, who never yet set your affections on things above ? Whither then must you be going ? Oh ! think how near you are to endless perdition ! And you, young persons, beware of indulging groundless prejudices against religion. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. Surely it cannot be too soon to be at peace with God ; too soon to be safe and happy ! “ Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding : for I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law. Get wisdom, get understanding : forget it not. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee : love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing ; get wisdom : and with all thy getting, get understanding.” Let Christians be concerned to walk daily in these pleasant ways. Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking off, from every discouragement, every allurements, and every imperfect example, unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Follow after, that you may apprehend *that* for which you were apprehended of Christ. Set a proper value on divine ordinances. Neglect nothing that your Lord has commanded. Live much in the exercise of grace. Show how happy your religion makes you. Remember it is written, They shall sing in the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord. The way of the Lord is strength to the upright. Bless God for ever bringing you into it. Pray that he would powerfully attract your hearts to himself. “ Draw us, and we will run after thee.” Seek constant guidance and assistance. Turn not aside for any difficulties. Listen not to any temptation. Where can you find such pleasure as you have found in communion with God ? Live always as in his sight. Prove that you abide in Christ, by walking as he himself also walked. Recommend his good ways to all

around you. Show how humble, how loving, how benevolent, how patient, how forgiving his religion makes you : how hard to be overcome of evil, how ready to overcome evil with good. Thus recommend his good ways to all around you, and adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things.

XXXII.

THE WAYS OF DEATH.

PROV. xiv. 12. xvi. 25.

There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

JEREMIAH has described the human heart as not only desperately wicked, but as deceitful above all things ; and in nothing does its deceit appear worse, than in blinding a man's eyes to the heinousness of his own sins. Many impositions do men practice on others ; but they still more frequently and more successfully impose upon themselves. So exceedingly do the passions influence the judgment, that it seems almost as if men could persuade themselves of any thing that they wish to believe. Solomon expresses himself in still more general terms ; yet that observation must not be taken without any limitation : and here it is spoken of merely as a case that very frequently occurs, not universally. This, however, should suffice to put us on our guard, and excite us to watch and pray that it may not be our case.

Yet, much as sinners are inclined to palliate their evil conduct, many of them know not only that some parts of their practice are contrary to the will of God, but that their general course is such as cannot lead to future happiness ; on which account they purpose, some time or other, to amend their ways.

But in many other instances the text to this day is fulfilled, as I shall endeavor to show ; and I pray God that I may so discuss the subject, as to detect the mistake, if any present are of the number. Though I have been a preacher now for many years ; yet as far as I can depend upon my own

memory and conscience, I think I never said any thing in the pulpit, whereby I aimed to expose any individual to the censure of others : but I certainly should be very glad so to preach, as to help my hearers to detect their own mistakes, and to guard against self-deception. Consider,

FIRST: To what ways will this observation especially apply? Shall I mention,

First, The way of thoughtless self-gratification?

Can you include this among the ways that seem right to you? As long as you do no great injury to others, and do not run into excesses that impair your health, or waste your fortune, do you persuade yourselves, it is right you should indulge so far in youthful pleasures, as to leave no time at present for serious reflection, or the remembrance of your Creator in the days of your youth? And are you ready to call every propensity natural and innocent, which you find is common to man since the fall, without distinguishing between what belonged originally to the human frame, and what is the consequence of sin? Will you flatter yourself, that because you are neither a profligate, nor a persecutor, therefore you cannot be in danger of death? Temporal death may soon overtake you; and can you escape eternal death, if you have no title to eternal life, nor preparation for it, nor scarcely any concern about it? Shall we apply it,

Secondly, To the way of the diligent worldling?

Surely, if conscience be not very unfaithful, you can have little more excuse than the former character. You are busily employed in worldly concerns: amassing riches for yourself, or perhaps for your family: and this you plead is right, to provide things honest, and lay up for your family: but is it indeed right you should mind only earthly things? that you should care only for time? and live without God in the world? Is it not right you should consider, who has put it into the power of your hands to get wealth? and for what purpose you are entrusted with so much? Is it not right to realize your dependance and responsibility? to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness? to use what God bestows, for his glory? to become a stranger and pilgrim on earth? to set your affections on things above? And

if this be not the case, will not the end of these things be death? But it will apply still more directly,

Thirdly, To the way of the lifeless formalist.

Such were many among the Jews, who drew nigh to God with their lips, while their hearts were far from him; and put their trust in lying words, saying, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are we." Jer. vii. 4. And such have been found among all classes of Christians; persons who have just the same belief of Christianity which others have of Mahomedanism or Paganism, because it was the religion of their fathers; who adhere to this or the other denomination, because they were brought up in it; are punctual in bodily worship, or outward attendance, but neither enjoy nor desire communion with God; have no heartfelt union with Christ, nor any regard for the divine glory. Like an old man, who once said, "He knew no reason for doubting of his salvation, since he had been all his life true to his church, and hated all schismatics and heretics." And it is very possible that some who once made a plausible profession of conversion and faith in Christ, may be found formalists, under the most scriptural form of church order. It will apply more strongly still,

Fourthly, To the way of laborious self-righteousness.

Though it is marvellous how small a rag of self-righteousness will serve to blind the eye of the mind, and so keep a sinner from discerning his need of salvation by grace; yet some whose consciences have been considerably awakened, will take a great deal of pains to establish their own righteousness, and will then be very positive that they are in the right way to eternal happiness. But how ignorant must they be of the extent, spirituality, and strictness of the divine law, and of its awful sanction. Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear what the law demands and denounces? All the heart, all the soul. "Cursed be every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law, to do them." What occasion was there for the coming of Christ, if you can thus entitle yourselves to eternal life? It will apply,

Fifthly, To the way of religious error.

Many who trust to their own righteousness, persuade themselves that we are mistaken in our ideas of the person and offices of Christ; and deny that we are in so fallen a state as to need an atoning sacrifice, or an entire renovation of nature. We allow that the most erroneous persons, have a right to think for themselves, with which we ought not to interfere, except by way of scriptural argument, and affectionate exhortation. But we must maintain that the holy scriptures contain a standard of faith, as well as of practice: and we beseech them to consider the danger of being misled, by the influence of pride and unbelief. Let them remember that Paul represents the preaching of the cross as being found a stumbling-block, and considered as foolishness, by those who boasted of their reason and wisdom, in his day. While he and the other apostles never seem afraid of exalting Christ too highly, and affirm, that other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, Jesus Christ. It will apply,

Sixthly, To the way of the deluded enthusiast.

To him, whose whole religion consists in a confident persuasion of his own safety, which he maintains without evidence from scripture, sense, or reason, taking it for granted he is safe, though he does not unite with Christ in the great design of his mediation, nor engage in any conflict which deserves to be called the good fight of faith. Some of these trust in themselves that they are righteous, and despise others; though the very righteousness in which they trust, is made, not of the semblance of justice, mercy, or walking humbly with God, but of pride and malignity, disguised under a few perverted evangelical phrases. They cannot be friends of free grace, for there can be no more grace in our salvation, than there would have been justice in our condemnation; and that they are not at all disposed to admit. Many of them represent man, before conversion, as sunk below all obligation, and after conversion as raised above all obligation, and so leave no room for the burden of sin; as there can be no transgression where there is no law. Nor are they concerned about the mortification of sin, or inward sanctification: this they deny. So nothing is left for the Spirit to do except

what an unholy spirit could do better than the Spirit of God, viz. assure them of safety while living in sin.

SECONDLY: What should we learn by this warning?

To search and try our ways; examine if we be in the faith; if Christ be in us; if we are new creatures. Let us give all diligence to make our calling and election sure. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Keep the narrow way. Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life.

XXXIII.

THE CAUSE AND CURE OF A WOUNDED SPIRIT.

PROV. xviii. 14.

A wounded spirit who can bear?

MERE natural fortitude will often enable a man to sustain a heavy load of outward calamity: much more will a good conscience, and the consolations of the Divine Spirit, support a true believer under very severe trials and afflictions; though they may be complicated and of long continuance: but if the *spirit* itself be wounded, or overwhelmed with gloom, who can bear it up? Suppose I should endeavor,

FIRST, To describe the cause of a wounded spirit.

Worldly troubles may sometimes seize on the mind, and depress the spirits to an extreme degree. Inordinate affections and disappointed pride, especially, bring on intolerable dejection. So Amnon pined away under the influence of his sinful passion. Ahab fretted himself sick for Naboth's vineyard. Ahitophel, when he saw that his counsel was not followed by Absalom, rode home and hanged himself. And many others have died of what is called a broken heart. These things take place, as we shall show presently, for want of the restraints and supports of true religion.

Yes, but religion itself is often charged with having the strongest tendency to dejection and melancholy. The alarming doctrines of those that are called evangelical preachers, are often represented as likely to drive persons to distraction. How can this charge be refuted?

Before I reply directly, I must premise one thing. There is a bodily disorder from which good men are not exempt, which tends to mental distress. And it is no more a fair objection, that religion should not secure any one who possesses it from *this* affliction, than it would be to allege that it does not prevent the gout, or a consumption. It would be a sad thing, if the Almighty made it a rule never to convert any person, who had a constitutional tendency to derangement, or any disorder of the brain. And if such persons are converted, it is to be expected, that their minds, in a season of distraction, will run upon the same subjects which previously occupied their attention; and that they will view them in a distorted manner, just as others, in a similar state, view the subjects with which they had been conversant. Cowper, the poet, was deranged long before he knew any thing of evangelical religion. He owed several years of comfort to the gospel. And the false idea which caused his distress in latter years, was in direct opposition to Calvinistic principles.

‘But do you not represent all men as children of disobedience, and exposed to eternal punishment; as unable to deliver themselves, and as lying entirely at God’s mercy?’ We do so. And we believe it to be a fact. And if it be so, it is fit we should declare it. If you do not realize the truth in the time of health, may it not break in upon your mind in the time of affliction, or at the hour of death? If you do not understand the whole truth thoroughly, may not a partial view of it be still more distressing? Or if you can keep your eyes closed till death, will it not be much worse to open them first in hell? I wish your consciences to be wounded, that they may be healed. I wish your false hopes to be slain, that you may obtain a good hope through grace. Now, therefore, consider your ways.

I wish you may be wounded with a sense of *danger*. I am fully convinced, that there is such a thing as the second death; the worm that dieth not, the fire that shall never be quenched. The wrath to come, from which you never can escape, if you die in sin. Knowing the terror of the Lord, I would fain persuade you of your danger. You hang by

the slender thread of life, over the bottomless pit, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, ready every moment to burn it asunder; and you have nothing on which you can lay hold to save you: nothing of your own; nothing you have done or can do, to induce God to spare you one moment. "What will you do in the day of the Lord's anger? Can your hands be strong, or your heart endure?"

I wish your spirits were wounded with a sense of your *guilt*. That you felt what just reason God has to be angry. How many, and how aggravated your sins! How many have secretly committed sins, which would put them to the blush, if told to the whole congregation, so that they would be ashamed to be seen here again. And oh, that the most decent were convinced of the evil of their hearts, and the evil of their sinful omissions; the evil of having no reverential, affectionate regard to God. Surely this is an evil and bitter thing. Have you done any thing for God, or forborne doing any thing for his sake? Have you dreaded his anger, valued his favor, abhorred the thought of acting contrary to his will, or so as to dishonor him? Even as to your fellow-men, have you dealt by others as you would wish them to deal by you? Have you no ground of self-reflection, for the neglect of relative duties? Nothing to pain you, if parents, husband, or children were removed? Especially, have you done your duty to their souls? Have you properly minded your own eternal interest? Would a death-bed excite no regret on this head?

Oh! I wish you were deeply wounded with a sense of your *ingratitude* toward the Saviour, and your neglect of so great a salvation! your arrogant attempts to establish your own righteousness, and your disposition to cavil at the sovereignty of divine grace. Surely if you had not hearts of stone, these sins would wound your conscience more than any other kind of sin. Consider, what advantages you have enjoyed, and how you have misimproved them. What resolutions and promises you have made, and how you have violated them. How astonishing is the patience and forbearance of God! Oh, that his goodness may lead you to repentance! If you are but deeply

wounded with a sense of these things, I would then gladly proceed,

SECONDLY, To point out the only cure of a wounded spirit.

Know ye, that God still waits to be gracious, and can be exalted in showing mercy. Though you have destroyed yourself, yet in him whose anger you have so justly deserved, your only help is found. The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth from all sin. He is able to save unto the uttermost, all that come unto God through him. The right of forgiveness is with God; and though he will never exercise it to his own dishonor, yet he can, without any impeachment of his moral character, forgive iniquity, transgression, and sin. He delights not in the death of a sinner, on its own account; and though he does delight in the display of his holiness, righteousness, and truth, yet all these perfections shine forth more illustriously in the sufferings of his incarnate Son, than in the personal sufferings of the sinner. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He died for ungodly enemies. No end would be answered by his death, if such are not saved by him, as could be saved no other way. The obedience of one such as he, will suffice to justify many, and exalt them to eternal glory. The grace which could provide such a ransom, must be free and self-moved. It is God's avowed design, that all that are saved, should be to the praise of the glory of his grace, being accepted in the Beloved. None who

come unto Jesus shall be cast out: all the invitations of the gospel are addressed to such as are described only by their wants and miseries.

No recommendation is needed; no money, no price is required. The pretence of bringing it would be the only thing to insure your rejection; for while he satisfieth the hungry poor with food, he sendeth the rich empty away.

He is as able to apply redemption by his Spirit, as he was to effect it by the blood of his dear Son. He can bow the will, enlighten the mind, ease the conscience, rectify all the disorders of the soul, create all things new.

Even the doctrine of sovereign, electing love, instead of putting a bar in the way of your salvation, at the most only leaves you as you would have been without it,

and in fact makes your salvation more probable than it would have been without it. I may say more—I believe it to be the only possible way of rendering the salvation of any sinner certain. Yea, set aside all special and efficacious influence on the soul, and I should despair of any sinner's attaining salvation.

There is one case of a wounded spirit, often more painful than any I mentioned under the former head, viz. that of the professed believer, who has sinned away the joys of God's salvation, and grieved the Holy Spirit. But the same remedies that I have already prescribed, are the best in his case also. Let him repent and look unto Jesus.

XXXIV.

THE PURCHASE OF TRUTH.

PROV. xxiii. 23.

Buy the truth, and sell it not.

THERE are two doctrines that have been warmly espoused by some of our modern divines, which do not well hang together; viz. the right of private judgment, and the innocence of mental error. For the former, rightly defined, I would be as zealous as any man; but I own I cannot make it harmonize with the latter. If error be neither criminal nor pernicious, it seems hardly worth while to risque much in defence of the right of thinking for ourselves. We may even let others think for us, and save ourselves the trouble. But if on the other hand, error be poison to the soul, and truth its food and medicine, it must be of consequence that we examine for ourselves, and stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. Yet while we remember his injunction, "Call no man master on earth," we must not forget his own claim, "One is your master even Christ." I think these remarks accord with Solomon's charge in the text—*Buy the truth, and sell it not.* We will notice,

FIRST, The object of this charge.—*Truth.*

As Solomon wrote under divine inspiration, and chiefly on religious subjects, he referred principally, no doubt, to religious truth. All truth is indeed of some value, but

none so valuable as that which relates to divine subjects. For example, That which relates to *God*, our Maker, his nature, attributes, and moral character, with the relations he sustains to his intelligent creatures. The true knowledge of *ourselves* is of like importance—our dependance, and obligations—our nature as moral agents accountable to God—our destiny as formed for immortality. Just ideas of our *duty*—to God—and each other. The standard of duty—its unalterable nature—the evil of violating the divine law—the awful consequences of so doing—the true knowledge of our *state*—whether we are not originally fallen, sinful, depraved—whether now pardoned and accepted of God—or still exposed to his wrath by our guilt. The true *method of salvation*. Is it true God can forgive sin? How is this consistent with his dignity, and the support of his government? Who is the Redeemer of God's elect? In what manner can he save us? How may we be made partakers of his salvation? What are really the *obligations* of the saved? Are they now free from all law but the mere impulse of gratitude; or are antecedent obligations confirmed and increased, to every moral duty? Are there any positive appointments to which they should attend? As to the *world to come*. Have we a just account given us of a future state? What is the nature of heaven? its enjoyments and employments? and what will become of the finally impenitent?

SECONDLY: The implication of the charge.—It implies the *worth and importance* of truth.

And surely the objects named, and others connected with them, must be of consequence. It cannot be a thing indifferent whether we have right views of them, or not. It seems to imply that we have a certain *standard* of truth, and that there are decisive *tests* by which it may be known. The advice to buy the truth would be useless if it could not possibly be attained, or when found, could not be distinguished from falsehood? We thank God there is a *standard* of religious truth, even his own *Holy Word*. To that would we always make our appeal, and thereby let every religious controversy be decided. Not by any authority of popes, councils, fathers, bishops, or ministers.

We should be thankful to any man for assistance, and be willing to follow light, though held out by a child, or an enemy: but no man is lord of our consciences, and the more boldly he claims it, the more we would suspect him. Though there is but one man on earth who says he is infallible, there are too many who think they are never in the wrong: but let us try all by the law and the testimony.

Neither lay too much stress on any sentiment as *commonly* received, nor build our faith on some individual of *great* repute. Be neither taken with the plea of *antiquity*, nor of *novelty*, unless sanctioned by the word of truth. Guard especially against prejudice from our own carnal inclinations and corrupt dispositions, which make us love to be soothed and flattered.

That which is really *scriptural*, is doubtless consistent with right reason; but if I lean to my own understanding, my reasoning is likely to be wrong and delusive.

Truth must also be *consistent*; but some very superficial thinkers may suppose themselves to be consistent, when they are extremely far from it.

All truth must certainly promote the divine glory; the glory both of God's *government*, and of his *grace*. All divine truth centers in Christ Jesus. Eph. iv. 21. All divine truth is of a sanctifying tendency, and leads to holiness of heart and life. This charge farther implies, The difficulty of attaining the truth, and the temptations we may have to part with it.

THIRDLY: The purport of the charge. It is expressed in a twofold form. A command—*Buy it, at any price*. A prohibition—*Sell it not, at any rate*.

There are many things which it may be necessary to give up for the truth's sake. Perhaps you have already imbibed false opinions, through the wrong instructions of others, or through the evil bias of your own hearts; notions flattering to human pride; or which would admit the gratifying of worldly lusts. You must give up pride, self-righteousness, and vain reasonings; give up every evil practice, all kind of sin; give up sloth and indolence, and be willing to search for truth as for hid treasure; give up a good name among them who do not know and obey the truth, the favor of men, and whatever worldly good cannot be kept without a good

conscience. Were you called to give your body to the flames, you need not repent your purchase. Various flattering offers may be made to induce you to part with the truth, but *sell it not*.

Not for love of ease, applause, favor of men ; not for the name of a sensible man, a liberal man ; no enthusiast ; no bigot, &c. Not for worldly gain, promotion, liberty, life. Luke ix. 23. 26. Show that you value truth more than bread. As you must have bread, let it be cheap or dear, so you must have truth at whatever price. Show that it is your food : be it your concern to grow thereby, more Christ-like, more humble, more holy, more devoted to God. Show that you are sanctified by the truth. Value all truth ; but value particular parts of truth according to their proportion to the whole evangelical system. Let it be seen that an agreement with others in fundamentals has more influence to unite you, than a disagreement in circumstantialia has to separate you.

Adorn the truth. Be valiant for it, but fight not with unhallowed weapons. Labor to propagate and recommend it, by word and deed.

XXXV.

SPIRITUAL SLOTH.

PROV. xxvi. 13—16.

The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way, a lion is in the streets. As the door turneth upon his hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed. The slothful hideth his hand in his bosom, it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth. The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit, than seven men that can render a reason.

MAN is formed for a life of activity. Moderate labor conduces to the health of the body ; and the exercise of the faculties of the mind is essential to the happiness of the soul. Even before the fall, God placed man in the garden he had planted for him, to cultivate it, though without fatigue ; and afterwards man was doomed to eat bread with the sweat of his brow. It is the duty of Christians to be active in the

service of God; they were quickened by God, that they might act for God. God is honored by diligence in the management of our secular affairs, provided we are careful to use only lawful means in the pursuit of temporal good, and treat God himself as our only satisfying portion. Those whom providence has placed in such circumstances as that they are brought under an engagement to work for others, should consider diligence and fidelity as important duties, by which they may adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour. Those whose circumstances require diligence in some lawful employment, to support themselves and their families, should be not slothful in business, but provide things honest in the sight of all men. Some indeed are exempt from the necessity of bodily toil, but such should use leisure for mental improvement, and for the good of others. Acts xxii. 35. And all should attend to their high calling; work out their salvation with fear and trembling; give all diligence to make their calling and election sure. Slothfulness is a shameful sin; idleness is a dishonor to religion; and especially idleness in religion is a great sin. It was worth while to warn us against sloth respecting the things of this world; but it is of more importance to warn us against it as to the concerns of another world. The man who should answer the character drawn in these four verses, would be pitiable, contemptible, and criminal, if it applied only to the affairs of this life; but if the evil applied chiefly to his spiritual concerns, his criminality would be greater, and the consequences more fatal.

FIRST: The sluggard is described by a cowardly disposition to magnify supposed danger.

Hence, some object to entering on a religious course, lest they should not be able to hold out. Others, who seemed once to engage in it, draw back after a while, and give up their profession. And others, though they do not wholly lay down their profession, yet make no progress in religion. It is true, religion has often exposed its professors to dangers and difficulties; but those to be encountered in the present day, are small indeed compared with those which others have encountered and overcome. Yet Christ said, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his

cross, and follow me. True religion, however, has supports and encouragements sufficient to counterbalance all the terrors that alarm the sluggard. He that refuses to walk in God's ways, for fear of the lion he expects to meet, will find far worse dangers await him in the ways of sin. It is said of the way of holiness, (Isa. xxxv. 9.) "No lion shall be there." He can only stand by the way-side, and roar to frighten cowards.

SECONDLY : He is described by dull formality and inactivity ; a mere stationary motion. *As the door will turn on its hinge, so the sluggard on his bed.*

Well may this be the case with those who lay the whole stress of their salvation on what was done for them by others, before they had any consciousness, and which they would not know had ever been done, but by the parish or family register. Never was this sort of religion pleaded for among protestants more openly than of late. Those, however, are not the only formalists to be found, whose religion consists in a regular routine of external duties, to which they attend, in private or in public, without any variation in the frame of their minds, or progress in the ways of God. It is to be feared, that some who once experienced some alarms of conscience, and afterwards seemed to receive the word with joy, may after a time sink into carnal security, and mind little more than keeping up their name and place among their fellow-professors. But the true Christian, instead of resembling the door on its hinges, or the sluggard on his bed, is a traveller to a definite home ; a racer running a prescribed race ; a warrior engaged in a serious conflict, fighting the good fight of faith ; keeping his course ; following after, to apprehend that for which he was apprehended of Christ. He has an object in view, which is never fully attained in this life, and must still pursue it ; he is more concerned to be safe, than to be easy ; and when he has the most comfortable persuasion of his safety, even this is not enough ; he wants to glorify God, and be useful in the church and the world.

THIRDLY : Spiritual sloth is often attended with neglect of lawful self-interest, and special enjoyment. "*The slothful*

hideth his hand in his bosom ; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth."

This clause sounds more hyperbolical than the rest, and would seem a caricature of the persons described. Some may be ready to ask, Who ever knew such a sluggard as this? Who would not eat his food when it was set before him? We must allow that the love of indolence is seldom carried so far; yet, perhaps, it would be no hard matter to find those who are clothed with rags, because they will not take the trouble to mend their raiment, or their children's: who want food for their families, or even for themselves, because they hate to labor. If any of this description pretend to religion, they exceedingly disgrace it. And is it not too common to find professors, who do not enjoy the comforts of religion, because they neglect the duties of religion? The harder our souls follow after God, the happier shall we be; the more we are concerned to glorify him, the more shall we enjoy him. If any, who were once active in his service, are now sunk into sinful somnolence, may I not appeal to your consciences, that your present dull security, if indeed you can keep it from being interrupted by alarming misgivings, is very inferior to the holy pleasure you once enjoyed.

FOURTHLY: Spiritual sloth is often joined with supreme self-conceit.

It is often the case, that the slothful, who rest on a mere form, attach themselves to the largest, or the uppermost party, and pride themselves on that account. Or, if they join a sect inferior in numbers, they rest satisfied with a zeal for such things as distinguish their party from others, rather than for those things in which all good men are agreed. Some pride themselves in adhering strictly to the form in which they were educated; others in their fancied superior light and knowledge. Some depend on human authority; others on their own imaginations. They ordinarily fix their attention on a few observances, or a few favorite points of doctrine, to the neglect of other truths, and other duties, and on this account are wise in their own conceit. Whereas the true Christian is concerned to follow the Lord fully; to adhere to evangelical truth and duty, in the

face of danger ; to make progress in God's ways, running with patience the race set before him ; abounding in the work and labour of love. Heb. vi. 11, 12. Though his hope is not always founded on a regular examination of evidence, yet it would always stand that test ; and as he grows in other graces, so in humility and dependance on grace.

XXXVI.

THE SORROW OF WISDOM.

ECCLES. i. 18.

For in much wisdom is much grief ; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

THIS book was written by Solomon in his old age, under divine inspiration. He was possessed of uncommon powers of mind, and had the best opportunity of acquiring knowledge of any man then in the world. He diligently applied his heart to it, and got more wisdom than all that were before him ; yea, his heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. For a while, he wretchedly wandered from God, made full trial of the world, and every supposable source of happiness therein ; but being brought back to God, he confessed he had found all earthly enjoyments vanity and vexation of spirit. Though intellectual pleasures greatly surpass those that are merely animal ; yet, every mental enjoyment that is not spiritual and holy, is insufficient to produce true happiness ; yea, in the issue, it aggravates disappointment and increases misery. This, I conceive, to be the primary sense of the text, though it will, in some degree, apply even to the case of the believer in the present life. Let me endeavor,

FIRST, To explain and illustrate this observation. " In much wisdom is much grief ; and he who increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."

Wisdom and knowledge are sometimes synonymous, but if distinguished, we must refer *knowledge* to an acquaintance with *things* and *facts* ; *wisdom* to the choice of *means* and *ends*.

I would show, how justly this observation will apply to all

mere natural knowledge and worldly wisdom. In whatever object men place their happiness, or by whatever means they pursue it, so long as they place it not in God, and seek it not by the way he has prescribed, their greatest sagacity cannot prevent a disappointment. But rather, the more wisdom they have, the more sensibly must they feel their disappointment, while more worldly wisdom cannot redress the grievance. The more wisdom and knowledge a man has, the more keenly he will feel the impossibility of obtaining true satisfaction from merely *sensual* enjoyments. These are too mean, uncertain, and temporary. And as to

mere *intellectual* gratifications, of whatever kind, that are not spiritual, they cannot insure happiness, but issue in an increase of grief and vexation. The more we pry into

human wisdom, and obtain knowledge of the various ways in which men have sought to obtain happiness, the more we shall see cause for grief and sorrow. Let a man

principally seek, either after his own private happiness, the present good of others, or his own and others' final happiness; and he will find the text hold good in various respects.

First: As to a man's own private happiness.

The wisdom of this world will never cure that selfishness of the human heart, which is so inconsistent with the general happiness of mankind, and even of the individual who is the subject of it. How many crooked things are there in a man's lot, which no worldly wisdom can make straight, nor even number what is wanting to give true happiness. So that the wiser a man is, who attempts to find happiness in the world, and the farther he pursues it, with the best advantages, the more must he see the impossibility of attaining it.

Much knowledge of worldly things is seldom attained but with great labor and much weariness to the flesh; and they who acquire the most, will be most sensible of the narrow limits of their attainments, and so urged on to more painful labor, or disgusted with the uncertainty of human wisdom.

Secondly: When worldly wisdom seems best employed, for the good of others, it is still attended with much vexation.

He who has much knowledge and wisdom, will be grieved at the ignorance and folly of others. Unless knowledge be sanctified, it tends to puff up the mind ; while they who seek honor from man, often find their wisdom undervalued ; and they who use it best, are envied of their neighbours ; and, at the same time, find it hard to bear the neglect and ingratitude of others ; their best plans being often disappointed for want of concurrence ; sometimes by wicked opposition, sometimes by unforeseen accidents, while the projector is injuriously blamed for want of success.

Thirdly : He that would, by mere human wisdom, obtain satisfaction as to the future state, will increase his sorrow indeed.

No satisfaction can be obtained on this head, but from divine revelation ; nor even with it are we likely to enjoy that satisfaction, unless we seek wisdom from above, to be imparted by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. He that has the most sagacity himself, or the most extensive knowledge of the different schemes men have devised to obtain future happiness, will find the text fulfilled.

Even with the Bible in our hands, if we have not our hearts established with grace, the more we search into theological controversies, and yet lean to our own understanding, or if our faith stand in the wisdom of men, the more we shall find ourselves puzzled with innumerable doubts and difficulties. Once more,

Were our ideas of God ever so just, as far as we could know him without the gospel, we should find that he who increaseth in knowledge increaseth in sorrow, until we became acquainted with the blessed Mediator. When God is thus known, as in Christ reconciling the world to himself, known truly and experimentally, then we shall find that this is life eternal.

And, in some respects, we may apply this observation, even to the knowledge of the Christian, in this present state of imperfection. Even spiritual knowledge is attended with some increase of sorrow ; but it is a godly sorrow, wholesome and salutary ; arising from a sense of our own ignorance, darkness, weakness, defect, criminality, and vile-

ness. This sorrow should even now enhance our value of the gospel, and so heighten our joy and gratitude; and it shall it length be turned wholly into joy. So the believer is grieved much for the sins of others. The more heavenly wisdom he has, the more he is grieved to see the glorious gospel undervalued. The more he knows of

the history of man in past ages, and of the present state of mankind, the more he increaseth sorrow. It has been calculated, that if the world were divided into thirty parts, nineteen are heathens; six, Mahometans; five, Christians of all sorts; and of these, what numbers are corrupt in their notions of Christianity! Others, how formal! O what a wretched world! He that increaseth in knowledge of it, increaseth in sorrow. But true religion affords relief, even here. They are blessed in every land, who sigh and cry for the abominations. Let the children of Zion be joyful in their king. There shall be better times on earth, and in heaven it will be otherwise; there will be a vast increase of knowledge, and no increase of sorrow. I would endeavor,

SECONDLY, To make some further improvement of the subject.

Let those who, by the providence of God, are precluded from obtaining extensive wisdom and knowledge in worldly things, be satisfied with their lot, and bless God that the poor have the gospel preached to them, and may understand it, and be saved by it, without great learning. Let those who are called more to intermeddle with human wisdom, prize that wisdom chiefly which cometh from above, and seek it by earnest prayer. Let them use every thing else which may bear the name, in subserviency to the divine glory, and in every right work implore assistance and direction from God, looking to him above for their reward. Let them prize divine revelation, and submit to its instructions. Account all things but loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. Implore and follow the light of the Holy Spirit, whose illuminations we need, not to reveal new truths which were not contained in the written word; but to show us the glory of the old revelation, which our depraved hearts

would otherwise reject, on account of the humbling and holy tendency of its genuine doctrines.

Let us examine if our knowledge be spiritual, humiliating, sanctifying, and experimental. If so, though it be attended, in this state of imperfection, with grief and sorrow, our sorrow will soon be turned into joy, and such as no man can take away.

In the world above, believers shall make the most rapid progress in knowledge, and find it attended with a proportionable increase of humility, holiness, and happiness, through eternal ages. And there all error, grief, and sorrow, will be banished for ever. There will be nothing in God to grieve us; and we shall see him face to face. Yea, there will be nothing in the saints to grieve us; nothing in ourselves. Nothing in the universe will grieve the believer any more.

XXXVII.

THE TRUE USE OF RICHES.

ECCLES. x. 19.

But money answereth all things.

I HAVE been desired this evening to attempt pointing out the *true use of riches*, and I shall be very thankful if I may but be enabled to do justice, in some degree, to the subject.

The possession of riches is no evidence of interest in God's peculiar favor; but the right use of them may be a strong evidence of our love to him: not, indeed, the external use, separate from the disposition and motive, but in connexion with the principle which leads the person so to employ them. God has, for the most part, chosen his people out of the poor of this world; but though not many rich, mighty, or noble are called, yet God has not excluded the rich, any more than the poor, from the blessings of his salvation.

We rejoice, that in this commercial city, there are many professors of religion who enjoy some degree of affluence, and wish to glorify God with their substance; and even those who have but a little surplus above necessary supplies, may

show their love to God, by their disposal of that little. Rich men, indeed, are exposed to many snares, and need the more caution, to be charged not to put their trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God. One scripture is often quoted wrong, as if money were the root of all evil, whereas Paul says, the *love* of money is so. Fondness for money, or covetousness, is very strongly condemned in many places. It is termed idolatry, and represented as an evidence of the want of all true religion. The evil, however, may very deeply infect those who cannot get money, though those who have most are commonly in the greatest danger, and are to be warned, when riches increase, not to set their hearts upon it. However, money itself is a blessing, which demands our gratitude to God; for, as Solomon here observes, *money answereth all things*. I propose, in prosecuting the subject, to attend to four things:

FIRST, To take some notice of the general usefulness of money.

I need not, indeed, enlarge much here. It is almost universally admitted. And, indeed, if any man should be found who professes a total disregard of money, he ought also to be able to do without most of the conveniences, or even necessities of life; without books or furniture, or a convenient habitation, or clothing, or food; for money answers "for all;" and if you will have them, and yet will neither labor for money, nor be careful in husbanding it, that so you may pay for them, some one else must. If, then, unprincipled prodigals will indulge themselves in feasting and wine, without caring who bears the cost; men who possess godliness should be careful, by diligence and frugality, to provide things honest in the sight of all men; and we should acknowledge our obligations to the God of providence, when he puts it into the power of our hands so to do. Money considered as a convenient and portable representative of property, and a circulating medium thereof, is a great blessing. Men may live as hunters, or as shepherds, without this convenience, but no people ever advanced far in civilization without it. How difficult it must be to get wants supplied, and to procure small but almost necessary articles, in a way

of barter only! One might have nothing to offer that suited the turn of his neighbour in exchange; and how troublesome to keep account of every thing till an opportunity of compensation might be found. But money purchases all commodities, and rewards all services; procures every kind of assistance, and settles every reckoning at once; while it may be kept without spoiling for future use; though that convenience renders it liable to an abuse, against which reason and scripture remonstrate. More of this by and by. But while money is allowed to be very useful, give me leave,

SECONDLY, To remind you of certain limitations of the proposition—that there are things which money cannot procure.

Money has no intrinsic worth, and can do no good to the proprietor, but as it is used, or exchanged for other things.

It would be of no use to a drowning man, nor to a man cast on an uninhabited or uncivilized country.

And where it would be of most avail, there are many things it cannot procure. It will answer for food or raiment, feasting or wine; it would pay for great works, building houses, &c. Yet, it will not insure health, happiness, nor immortality.

It will pay a physician, but cannot insure his success in the removal of pain, recovery of strength, or prevention of death.

It cannot confer moral worth, or make a man truly honorable, estimable, or virtuous.

It will not buy peace of conscience, nor procure the pardon of sin; redeem the soul from hell, nor give a title to heaven. Nay, what is worse, it may, by being misused, become very prejudicial. By calling off the mind from the most important concerns; by enabling to gratify lusts, and so tempting to sin; by enabling to do mischief, and so exposing to righteous punishment; by becoming the object of an idolatrous, preposterous affection, and thus offending God, and excluding from heaven; and by aggravating future condemnation.

Hence it appears of great importance,

THIRDLY, To point out the best mode of using money, especially by those who possess more than sufficient to answer their own wants.

Every one should be thankful for needful supplies, and be concerned to provide things honest in the sight of all. The poor should be concerned, by diligence and frugality, to avoid robbing those who are poorer than themselves, of that which their wealthier neighbours have to spare. And many who are far from being called rich might share in the pleasure of doing good. But, at this time, I am especially called to remind those, who are conscious they have a larger measure of property than many, that God himself directs that they should be charged "to do good, to be rich in good works, willing to communicate." 1 Tim. vi. 18. If your riches

are a blessing, and not a curse, they are given you that you may be a blessing, that you may find enjoyment in doing good. The right use of riches, consists in lessening the miseries and promoting the happiness of your fellow-men; and in thus glorifying God. They who thus use them, have the best enjoyment of them. It is said, that Heliogabalus wished for a neck as long as a crane's, that he might taste his food all the way it descended into his stomach. The benevolent man has a superior enjoyment, who tastes food with a hundred mouths, and enjoys that which causes the widow's heart to sing, more than what he is obliged to eat himself. O my brethren, is not this the noblest use of riches? Is not he the happiest, who does the most good, and takes the most delight in it? Especially, he who aims most earnestly at uniting these two ends in one—the good of his fellow-creatures, and the glory of God?

How much may be done in this way by individuals, if their hearts are duly set upon it! How much, by the united efforts of societies! Christianity, even in its lowest state, is favorable to benevolence. No hospitals or infirmaries were known in the pagan world. But how much more does genuine, heartfelt Christianity tend to excite compassion, and put us on doing good to the souls, as well as bodies of men. The number of charitable institutions at Bristol, is a great honor to the city. Their almshouses, infirmary, charity schools, benevolent schools; the institution for orphans, for the instruction of the blind; the religious instructions granted to the objects of many charities; the society for the suppression

of vice; the penitentiary for poor thoughtless females plunged by one false step into such a gulph of ruin, from which it would be impossible almost to extricate themselves. What tales of woe have some of us heard, and what hopeful impressions have we seen under the word. Our religious tract society. The assistance granted to the erection of places of worship; and shall we that love the gospel, complain they are so many? From hence, also, considerable assistance has been afforded to several missionary societies; and what is more important, than to spread the knowledge of Christ among benighted heathens? Can you hear of their idols, their superstitions, burning of widows, sacrificing of children to Gonga, running spits through their tongues, being crushed to death under the wheels of the Raut of Jaggernaut, and not pity them? I know many of you have felt for them; for your bounty has passed through my hands, freely and without solicitation. Go on then, ye liberal souls, to devise liberal things, for by liberal things ye shall stand. Is. xxxii. 8. Ah, if all the rich men in Bristol, or in Britain, were as rich in grace as they are in gold, how much good might they do! How much more might be done to promote the temporal and spiritual welfare of our neighbours and countrymen, by diffusing religious knowledge among the poor! Might not professors excite the attention of their acquaintance to religious truths, by presenting some edifying publication, instead of other gifts. (Wilberforce on Real Christianity, Scott's Essays, Newton's Messiah.) How much more might be done abroad, to revive religion in the Greek church; to reform Popish countries; to introduce the gospel among Mahometan and Pagan nations. But it is time I proceed,

FOURTHLY, To add some motives to excite those, whom God has entrusted with money, to make the best use of it.

Consider, my friends, that if money be not used, it can do no good to yourselves, any more than to others. Who would think it any great honor, for a man to be employed as a watchman, centinel, or guard at the door of a room, in which were deposited ten thousand bags of gold and silver, if none of it was at his own disposal, but belonged to some other

person? And what odds does it make, if you call it your own, but have no heart to use it, and so have no more power over it than if it were another's? It is not properly yours; it is Mammon's, or Plutus's, and you are the poor sentinel to guard it.

Remember, all you have is the gift of Divine Providence. God puts it into the power of your hands to get wealth; and he says, "The silver is mine, and the gold mine." And you ought to acknowledge, when you honor him with your substance, "Of thine own have we given unto thee."

You are his stewards, and have these things committed to you but for a season; you are responsible to him, and must give account of your stewardship.

Has not God been kind to you, on purpose that you, imitating his liberality, might be kind to others? And if you are made partakers of spiritual as well as of temporal blessings, are you not doubly bound to gratitude? Oh! show that you know

"the grace of our Lord Jesus, who, though he was rich, yet for your sakes became poor." Remember, the Judge of the world will say at the last day, "Ye *did* it to ME," or "Ye did it *not* to ME."

Reflect on the possibility of great losses before death, and the certainty of parting with all at death. Which will then be the most painful or pleasing reflection—'I withheld more than was meet, and now all is taken from me, or I must loose all:?' Or, 'Blessed be God! while I had it in my power, I loved to use all for his glory: surely I took more delight in what I spent to promote his cause, than in all I laid out on myself.?'

But, some may be ready to object, that to urge them to so large a distribution of their property, is making religion a very expensive thing. *Answer*: Is not wickedness and irreligion more expensive? How do men lavish gold out of the bag for idols! and has the true God no credit? Are places of worship so expensive; and are places of amusement erected and kept open without any cost? Do people lose nothing by attending balls and routes, plays and races? Or are these entertainments more worthy of rational and immortal creatures than the means of preparation for eternity?

How little does religion cost some professors, compared with what they save by not being irreligious?

Does not a man save much for his family, by being converted to God, and taught to shun idleness, tippling, gaming, and vicious companions?

When we recommend beneficence to all professors, we do not exhort any one to give what is not truly his own. Nor do we deny the lawfulness and propriety of providing for your family. But we urge the propriety of setting your family a good example. We say it is better to leave your children a small fortune with a blessing, than a large one with a curse. Indeed, it seems, as if persons were often most in danger of becoming fond of money, and unwilling to part with it, who have the smallest families, or no near relations. People with large families are forced to let money come and go, and thus get a habit of parting with it. But the less a man has to do with his money, while he yet gets a good deal, the more he is in danger of sitting by the side of his chest, and looking at it, till it fascinates him, so that he cannot get his eye off it, nor his heart loose from it.

Now I bless God that his grace can break the charm, and has done so for many of the more wealthy professors in this city: but really, scripture and observation lead me to suspect, that there is always a sort of witchcraft in a large heap of gold. The larger the heap, the more grace it requires to keep a man from being bewitched by it. The more a man has, the more he is in danger of losing the power of disposing of it to the best advantage. Hence, our Lord speaks of it as so hard a thing for those that have riches, to enter into his kingdom. However, with God there is nothing impossible.

But let all who love their souls take heed, and beware of covetousness. There is no sin the Bible condemns more severely. It may affect those who are not rich, and is often the means of keeping men from being rich. It makes them show their eagerness to get money, so as to defeat their own end. Let those who have but little, be thankful with that little, and not say, We can do nothing for God, and can show no kindness to others. Let those to whom providence has been most liberal, delight in being liberal. Beware of the snares of affluence, and remember, that the best and only

way of keeping money from doing yourselves harm, is to be perpetually doing good with it. The rust of brass is a strong poison, but gold will not rust. However, when it is long hoarded, there is a sort of spiritual rust, that is more poisonous to the soul than verdigris can be to the body.

I trust, I can and do pray with sincerity, and I hope many of you can join me, that God will never entrust us with more money than will really forward us in the way to heaven; that he would make us willing to say, 'We are not our own, and all we have Lord, is thine own. Teach us so to use it, as that it may answer the best purposes to which it can be applied. Let us act as thy stewards, and aim in all things at thy glory.'

XXXVIII.

THE YOUNG ADMONISHED.

ECCLES. xi. 9, 10.

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth; and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.

MINISTERS have reason to keep in mind Solomon's charge, in the 6th verse; and therefore, though we have often been ready to exclaim, Who hath believed our report? yet, we should still repeat our warnings, especially to the rising generation.

The former part of this paragraph would be attended to with much pleasure, by many young people, if what follows did not explain the wise man's meaning, and show that he gives an apparent license, only to make the following admonition sink the deeper. We may, therefore, make a threefold distribution of the subject. For we have here,

FIRST, An ironical permission. *Rejoice, O young man, &c.*

We allow, it is not to be understood as censuring all youthful cheerfulness, and moderate enjoyments. Youth is

the season for sprightliness, vigor, and activity. Scripture allows children exercise and diversion. Zech. viii. 5. Solomon seriously exhorts young persons to the thankful enjoyment of temporal mercies. ix. 9. Yet, it certainly was not intended to authorize the unlimited indulgence of youthful inclinations, but rather to operate as a striking reprehension of the levity and vanity too commonly indulged by the young and inconsiderate.

While he seems to allow, he means to forbid. q. d. 'Ah! young man, I know what advice would suit you, could I give it you consistently with my regard for your highest welfare. I might then encourage you to confide in your health, beauty, and strength; to abandon yourself wholly to present gratification; to lay your plan, as I did, for a long succession of pleasures and sensual enjoyments; (ii. 1—10.) to indulge your appetites and passions without restraint; banish all thoughts which would embitter your sinful, and moderate even your more lawful pursuits; to give up yourself to your own inclinations, and follow the dictates of your own heart; to regard things present and visible, without any hindrance from the thought of what is future and invisible!'

Ah! my young friends, is not this agreeable advice? If the whole Bible agreed with it, many who take pains to become infidels, would excuse themselves from that trouble. But behold, here follows,

SECONDLY, An awful admonition. *But know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.*

Whoever thou art, thou art capable of this knowledge, thou art an accountable creature. Thou art justly considered a subject of the divine government. It is not thy youth that will excuse thee from final judgment; nor that will assure its being long delayed; nor will it be found to palliate thy guilt. God who knows the heart, hates sin, and can punish it severely. God who is love, will yet have no mercy on thee, if thou shall continue impenitent till death. Yea, God will bring thee into judgment for *all these things*: i. e. sins of youth, as well as of old age; youthful extravagance as well as sordid covetousness. Not only for some grosser impurities, but for all thy forgetfulness of God, neglect of his

word, ridicule of religion, like Ishmael and the children at Bethel. Alas ! how are children serious in trifles, and trifling in serious things ; prefer vanity to virtue ; and the pleasures they enjoy in common with the brutes, to those which constitute the bliss of angels ! *Youth* are often self-sufficient and head-strong ; their passions are violent ; they are eager after lawless liberty, impatient of reproof, and sanguine in expectation of happiness from the world. It is well said, Childhood and youth are vanity. God will bring thee into judgment. For what ? For loving pleasure more than God. Neglect of your own soul, preferring vain company to his worship. Prayerlessness. Despising his great salvation. Neglect of the kingdom of heaven. If I were to name grosser evils, would not conscience testify against some, whose friends have no suspicion of them ?

THIRDLY : A friendly exhortation. *Remove sorrow from thine heart, and evil from thy flesh.*

My dear young friends ! we seek your interest, your honor, your safety, your endless happiness. We would only damp vain hopes, dispel delusive charms, prevent ruin and wretchedness, and guide your feet into the way of peace and durable felicity. O seek the pardon of sin, lest guilt should burden your conscience in old age, or on a dying bed ; lest it sink your soul to hell at death, and transport your flesh thither at the resurrection. Seek converting grace betimes, lest late repentance be bitter, more dubious, more painful, or lest you should be given up to final impenitence. Seek strength from God, against your evil propensities, your unruly desires, and hasty passions. Think what mischiefs these lawless indulgences may bring on you in time. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. Beware lest you should have to complain, that your bones are full of the sins of your youth ; lest a dart should strike through your liver, or you should mourn at last, when your flesh and your body are consumed. Prov. v. 9—14. xxiii. 20, 21. 27—32, &c. Come then, and taste how good the Lord is, and how happy are they that love him in sincerity. Weigh the substantial enjoyments of eternity, against the lying vanities of time. If true religion abridges some pleasures, it bestows,

in their room, those that are far superior. It forbids those pleasures only, that are unlawful in themselves, or that are procured by wrong means, or that are enjoyed in a wrong way. And such pleasures are ever counterbalanced by pain; by painful impatience in the pursuit, painful labor in attaining, painful anxiety in possessing, and disappointment and vexation in losing them. While the good man seeks without impatience, possesses without anxiety, enjoys without loathing, uses without abusing, and loses things earthly without despair.

And his chief good is certain to be attained, satisfactory in the enjoyment, and permanent in its duration. It imparts peace to the conscience, purifies the heart, ennobles the mind, elevates the soul above the world, unites it to God; banishes guilt and slavish fear, the love of sin, the terrors of death, and all evil for evermore. Therefore, if you would put away sorrow and vexation from your heart, attend without delay to the voice of heavenly wisdom.

For if childhood and youth are vanity, though confessedly the season for enjoyment, what will old age be, but corroding care, pitiable weakness, full of aches and pains and fears; while laden with iniquity, and hardened in a course of sin, you stand tottering on the brink of hell, and sink into the bottomless gulph, to rise no more.

Surely all who know the worth of religion themselves, must be anxious for the salvation of others, for the diffusion of religious knowledge, and especially for the prevalence of genuine piety in the rising generation.

XXXIX.

BELIEVERS GOD'S WITNESSES.

Isa. xliii. 10.

Ye are my witnesses.

SUCH was the honorable character sustained by the Jewish church, and surely it is no less applicable to true Christians.

FIRST: Let me mention some of the principal things, which believers are called to witness for God.

First: You are witnesses to his *being and glorious perfec-*

tions. You have seen, not only the greatness of his natural perfections, but the glory of his moral excellencies—have felt his power, feared his wrath, seen his purity, tasted his grace, tried his veracity, experienced his all-sufficiency. You are sure he is God.

Secondly: To the equity of his holy law. You are sure he has a right to the throne, that he cannot deny himself, that he deserves all he demands, that sin is as bad as he says it is, and deserves all God has threatened; sure you are condemned justly; sure you have no excuse, nothing that can justify your disaffection to the divine character, or disobedience to the divine will.

Thirdly: To the excellence of his gospel. You are assured of its divine original: so glorious a gospel could have no other author. You fall in with its humbling import; you are sure you could not save yourselves; sure that the Saviour it reveals must be divine; are assured of its sufficiency and efficacy to ease wounded consciences.

Fourthly: To the power of his grace. You know you were far off, as averse as any, as attached to the world and sin, enslaved to Satan, obstinate, foolish, proud, long wooed and awed in vain. You know he can change hearts of stone. Jer. xx. 7. “Thou hast persuaded me.” You are sure you did not come of your own accord; and that he can draw any, who drew you.

Fifthly: To the influence of his truth. You are witnesses to the holy tendency of the doctrines of grace, to the purity of the Christian religion. It tends to universal holiness, endears the divine character, enlivens true devotion, constrains to obedience. It teaches contentment, patience, submission, resignation; it instructs us to copy Christ's pattern, as well as to rely on his priesthood. It inculcates all relative duties; teaches us to be sober and righteous, as well as godly; yea, it renders people openhearted, generous, and devisers of liberal things. O do not ask, *What must I do, to be safe or in repute?* but be ever asking, *What can I do for God and my fellow-creatures?* It teaches love to all saints, to sinners, to the poor who cannot recompense you again, to enemies; it teaches forbearance, meekness, government of the passions,

gentleness, tenderness, sympathy, fortitude. It teaches weanedness from the world, heavenly mindedness, bearing the cross; never to rest satisfied with present attainments; but to be always watching, praying, striving, pressing on, mourning over sinful defects.

Sixthly: To the *use of his ordinances*. You know God answers prayer; you have prayed in secret, and he has rewarded you openly. Your heart has been overwhelmed, and you have found support, ease, deliverance. Christ really is with his people, as he promised. In Judah God is known: as we have heard, so have we seen. Where the word of a king is, there is power. Is not my word a fire? Doth it not do good? Yes, we have found him in Bethel. Are his ordinances vain institutions? No, ye have been buried with him, and seen where he lay. Ye have sat at his table, and he was known in breaking of bread.

Seventhly: To the *attention of his providence*. You know his eyes are in every place, his tender mercies are over all his works. He fixes the bounds of your habitations, and doth all things well. Nothing is too hard for him. He can embitter comforts, or sanctify troubles; can restrain foes, raise up friends, exalt or abase, overrule free agents, change the purposes of kings, defeat counsels; (Is. xlv. 10.) relieve wants, by means most unlikely; support, direct, deliver, make all things work together for good.

Eighthly: To the *fulfilment of his promises*. Is he not faithful? a very present help? sure to perform the good thing he promised? Jer. xxxiii. 13. Just and faithful to forgive, to cast out none, to give the heavy-laden rest, to supply all need, renew strength according to our day? Is he not all-sufficient? A strong hold in the day of trouble? Has one word failed? Is not godliness profitable? A support under trials? Are not crosses sanctified? Is not all need supplied according to his riches?

Ninthly: To the *glorious nature of his rest*. Does not one remain for the people of God? Is it not glorious? Worth while becoming pilgrims for it? Are not pleasures at his right hand? Is not the promise sure? Have not you had the earnest? Are not its main constituents known? Is not

the heaven you desire, a state wherein you shall *see* God, and be *like* him ; enjoy his *presence*, and perfect *conformity* to him alone? For this, it is worth while to abandon earth, and to make it our chief concern in life to travel thither. It is worth dying for. " They who say such things declare that they seek a city."

SECONDLY : Describe the character and qualifications of God's witnesses.

They are *chosen*, *called*, and *faithful* witnesses. Rev. xvii. 14. Is. xli. 8, 9. Acts xxii. 14, 15. How great then, is the honor put upon you, if you are among the number of these witnesses.

True believers are *impartial* witnesses for God, owning the evil of sin ; not offering to justify themselves. Siding with the gospel against themselves, as to the power of sin ; i. e. they acknowledge that if in many things we all offend, it is our own fault, and not the gospel's. Though we have a disposition to be perfectly holy, that disposition is not perfect ; hence, we cannot do as we would : for this we mourn, and blame ourselves.

They are *experimental* and *practical* witnesses. They know what they say, and whereof they affirm. Real Christians do more than others, though they dare not depend on their doings. And though they do not all they would, they hate every false way, follow after holiness, and mortify sin.

They are *tried* witnesses. Many of them have testified the excellence of the gospel, even when they have had but little hope of interest in its blessings. Many have cleaved to Christ against their temporal interests. They have had trial of cruel mockings, if not actual sufferings. Is God better than the world, than father or mother, or than children ? Is his favor better than life ? Can it make up all losses, support under all trials ? Can thy God, in whom thou trustest, deliver ?

I might say, They are *sworn* witnesses. Willing to swear to the divine truth. xlv. 29. You durst to take your oath of all these things.

They are *many* witnesses, and *continued* witnesses. God has always had some, and will have a succession.

They are *living* and *dying* witnesses. Would they always hold to it, if their testimony were false? and would that testimony be never more full and firm than in view of eternity, even when slain for their testimony?

Surely they are *competent* witnesses. Not many rich, mighty, or learned, indeed; nor need they be such. They have souls and feelings; reason; conscience; integrity; and commonly somewhat of earthly possessions to lose.

They are *credible* witnesses; nay, *unanswerable*; ver 9. What can you object to their testimony?

At the last day, they will be *convincing* witnesses, or else *condemning* witnesses.

Sinner, hearest thou not what they testify against thee? If they are right, you are wrong. They witness for God, and God will witness for them.

O, believers, bear witness. A faithful witness will not lie. Be consistent witnesses. Do not say God is wise, but his dealings wrong. The gospel holy, but I like sin.

Lament that you are such defective witnesses. Speak out. Of whom are you afraid? You speak for the judge; for the king—against prisoners, and Satan, and sin.

Learn what will be the best evidence of the truth of religion, even to yourselves. Be religious yourselves; walk with God, deal with God.

Learn the necessity of regeneration. You must be born of God, or you will never make thorough witnesses.

Learn the advantage of trials. Be reconciled to afflictions. God tries you that you may be witnesses. Trials give weight to your testimony. And thus you may account for many mysteries of providence.

In whatsoever situation you are at present, whether it be agreeable or not, be not so anxious for a change, as to know how you may glorify God, under the existing circumstances.

Ask what testimony does God now call for. There is probably some point which you could not attest with equal advantage in any other situation of your affairs. Suppose it should be that he is the God of patience, that he can enable you to deny yourself, bear the cross, or forgive injuries, or endure hardness like a good soldier of Christ, or overcome the world!

XL.

CHARACTERISTICS OF DIVINE REVELATION.

ISA. xlv. 19.

I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain. I the Lord speak righteousness, I declare things that are right.

IN the former part of this chapter, we have a surprising prophecy of the conquests of Babylon, by Cyrus. That prince was foretold by name, as victor over the Chaldeans, and as the deliverer of the Jews, about two hundred years before the event.

The exactness with which the prediction was fulfilled, is very remarkable. Isaiah mentions, drying up the river; (xlv. 27.) gates not shut; (xlv. 1.) great treasures; (xlv. 3.) Sardis and Babylon, the two richest cities in the world. Pliny reckons the wealth taken by Cyrus, £.126,224,000. In verse 7, Isaiah contradicts the Persian notion of two supreme principles of light and darkness, or good and evil.

He insists that there are no powers or agents, good or bad, but what are under the absolute control of the one living God, whose word is steadfast for ever.

Thus the Lord confirms the faith of his people in him, and then encourages them to consider their return from Babylon, as a type and pledge of a greater salvation; (17.) without which the earth would seem to have been made in vain. (18.) In the text, the revelation God has made of himself in his word is contrasted with the dark, lying, useless oracles of the heathen.

I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth.

I am Jehovah, who speak truth, who give direct answers.

Thus we are led to meditate on the essential and excellent characteristics of the gospel revelation.

FIRST: Divine revelation encourages, and will endure free examination.

It never shuns the light. Men are charged to search the scriptures. The *facts* were not things done in a corner, but before numerous enemies. *Doctrines* not industriously concealed. Heathen oracles were given from some deep,

obscure cavern. So at Delphos, there was a great chasm or cleft in the earth, in which was situated the adytum, or hidden part of the temple, whence answers were given. How differently was the law given on Mount Sinai. All Israel must know the truth of such histories, and so must heathen nations around. Their history was connected with that of the most famous nations of antiquity. So as to Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Jews and Romans were concerned to contradict it; yet the belief of these facts spread on the spot, and in the most enlightened parts of the Roman empire; and still prevails in the most learned nations, though opposed in the keenest and subtlest manner. So as to *doctrines*: They are delivered clearly and expressly; and a standing ministry is appointed, not to conceal, but to explain them. Men are not required to lay aside their reason, though they are required to lay aside prejudice. 1 Pet. ii. 12. "As new-born babes." The nature of the case makes it requisite that they should beware of self-flattery, and the influence of their own lusts and sinful passions. Papists, indeed, would withhold the sacred scriptures from the common people; but we utterly condemn this practice, and so does the Bible itself.

SECONDLY: The gospel revelation is *express* and *determinate*, not ambiguous and doubtful.

The heathen oracles were famous for uncertain answers. So Cræsus who was conquered by Cyrus, had been told by the oracle,

"If you across the river Hylas go,
You shall a mighty nation overthrow."

Another prince, on a like occasion, received this ambiguous answer to his inquiry,

"Go and return again never you shall be slain."
But, saith the Lord, "I am Jehovah, who speak truth, who give direct answers."

Not that all parts of scripture are equally plain. A collection of small books, written in one country, by several writers, at different periods, but all of them many ages ago, must be obscure in some parts, to people of another country, who live at so great a distance of time, especially in the historical part, through allusions to

local customs. But how clear are the main doctrines of both law and gospel, respecting the moral government of God; the rule of duty; the evil of sin; the lost estate of man; the way of his recovery; the mediator and the sanctifier; the future judgment; the eternal world.

THIRDLY: The subjects of this revelation are *important* and *interesting*, not trivial and unsatisfying.

Some objects of knowledge may be attained with precision, and yet be of little use, especially to many individuals, no way essential to their happiness, nor certainly conducive to it.

Not so the truths of scripture revelation. No man can be happy without acquaintance with them; none can be happy who reject or deny them; none can perish who cordially embrace them. They promote and insure happiness here and hereafter. How can a man be happy without the knowledge of God, or of himself? without being able to resolve such questions as these:—Who gave me my being? For what end did my Maker call me into existence? What is my duty? What will be my destiny? What does God require of me now? and how will he dispose of me at last? Am I already in a state of friendship with him? How may I be reconciled to him? Whence can I derive support and consolation amidst the troubles of life, and the terrors of death?

These interesting inquiries can be answered only by a revelation from God. But the sacred scriptures give a full and satisfactory solution.

FOURTHLY: The gospel revelation is *true* and *faithful*, not false and delusive.

If it were open and determinate, and had relation to the most important concerns; yet if it were not *sure* and *certain* also, we were never the nearer our end. But, “I never said to the seed of Jacob, seek ye me in vain.” The declarations, invitations, and promises of the gospel are faithful sayings, and worthy of all acceptation.

And the most solid and certain advantages are connected with the practice of true religion. Though the Christian acts, not on sordid, mercenary principles, yet it is a fact, but not in the sense that Satan would have suggested, that “He doth not serve God for nought.” Especially the Lord is a God,

hearing prayer, as all can attest who have truly sought him in the way that he hath appointed, through the mediation of Christ. Though they have not every thing they ask, (David was denied his child's life;) yet they never go to God in vain. When not exempt from sufferings, they are better prepared for them by seeking God. When not delivered, they are at least supported. Yea, they find trials productive of the peaceful fruits of righteousness. It is ever good for them to draw near to God. He has given them exceedingly great and precious promises, and he will fulfil them all; both as to this life, and that which is to come.

FIFTHLY : The gospel revelation is *holy* and *righteous*; it has nothing in it iniquitous or licentious. "I speak righteousness, I declare things that are right."

The *descriptions* of the Bible are right, agreeing with the true nature of things. God gives us right ideas of himself, and of his moral government; right views of ourselves, of our relation to God, and of our revolt from him; our wretched, fallen state.

His *requisitions*, of service and cordial conformity to his holy law, are perfectly right and even. His *denunciations* of vengeance are just and right.

It is right that the soul that sinneth should die. God's plan of *salvation* is righteous altogether. No other religion ever attempted to reconcile the honor of God and the happiness of a sinner; or could afford ease to a guilty conscience, without giving the least encouragement to sin, or relaxing obligations to duty.

But the gospel revelation consults the rights of deity, and the interests of holiness. It displays the divine righteousness in the salvation of guilty sinners; and while it releases from an obligation to punishment, it confirms and increases our obligations to obedience. It secures also the rights of men, as well as those of God: promoting not only piety, but universal justice and benevolence; enjoining to do to others, as you would that they should do to you. Nor does it teach us to be just and kind only conditionally, if others will be very careful to behave properly to us. It shows us that it is infinitely right for pardoned sinners to forgive others, to bless their enemies. How should

you bless God for his glorious revelation, and be concerned to improve it, lest if you never should seek him in truth, the very pagans should rise up in the judgment and condemn you.

You who have sought the Lord, and found it was not in vain, bless him who bade you to seek his face, and inclined you to obey his call; and adore him that you have found him more than answer your expectations. Be ashamed that you should ever grow slack and negligent in so blessed a duty. Attend still to his word, and be concerned to live to his glory.

XLI.

THE WRITTEN WORD OPPOSED TO IMPRESSIONS ON THE IMAGINATION.

JER. xxiii. 28.

The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord.

THE subject now proposed for consideration, is of great consequence, both to guard professors against entire delusion, and to caution true believers against very injurious mistakes. For, as in the days of inspiration, there were false pretenders to the gift of prophecy, some of whom lay in wait to deceive, and others probably first deceived themselves, and then misled others; so there are now pretenders to Christian experience, some of whom are designing hypocrites, and others unhappy self-deceivers: while not a few real Christians may suffer loss by taking empty chaff for solid wheat, or may be distressed for want of that which is not worth their seeking after.

The text refers more immediately to such as profess to be teachers, but by the fairest analogy, the leading sentiment will apply to all the hearers of the divine word.

It would lead us off from our business to inquire, How the true prophets could distinguish the inspiration of the Spirit, who sometimes communicated instruction in dreams, from the common visions of the night.

It is reasonable to believe that when God made an immediate revelation, he could infallibly assure the recipient that it was from himself; while the importance and consistency of true prophecy, and its evident tendency to God's honor, would commonly satisfy a judicious hearer whence it came. The meaning of the text seems to be, If any one not fully assured of his own inspiration, had a dream which he thought remarkable, let him tell his dream, but not rashly affirm more than he could prove; and whoever had a real revelation from heaven, let him be only concerned to speak it faithfully, without alteration, addition, or suppression, leaving all consequences with God.

But our present business is to consider what we are to learn from this divine admonition, who are favored with the whole Bible, and enjoy the benefit of the written word completed. Surely we ought to treat the Holy Scriptures as a perfect rule, the infallible standard of faith and practice. No impressions on the imagination must be regarded by us in competition with the word of God, asleep or awake. That which is fairly grounded on the divine word is like substantial wheat; all other sources of consolation or direction are light and worthless as chaff. Let us therefore,

FIRST, Consider the extent of our obligations to regard the divine word.

We are bound to submit implicitly to its decisions respecting every article of faith, and to adhere to it stedfastly in every branch of obedience, treating it as a sufficient directory in all our religious concerns. We are not authorized to expect any addition to it, nor may we dare to make any diminution from it. We must not presume to adulterate it, nor indulge a wish to have it altered. We should be anxious to understand its full import, and readily bow to its authority. It is a folly to wish it to say more, and a sin to want it to mean less. 2 Tim. iii. 15—17. "It is able to make us wise to salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus, being all given by inspiration, profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." We must be entirely governed by the word of God, in forming

all our religious opinions, in judging of our spiritual estate, in learning our whole duty ; what we should pursue, and what we should avoid ; and in conducting ourselves under providential trials. We cannot learn from it what it was never intended to reveal. We should reverence the silence of scripture, not intruding into things unseen. The Bible is not intended to gratify curiosity, but to reveal what is needful and profitable. Many things are concealed respecting angels, the universe, future events. Some things respecting the church and the world are revealed. We must use great caution and modesty as to unfulfilled prophecy. There is no revelation of future events as to individuals ; as to life and death ; riches and poverty ; the continuance or the removal of affliction. This is not needful.

SECONDLY : Notice some of the various ways in which many have been seduced from paying a proper attention to the word of God.

Some have been drawn aside from the word of God by an undue regard for human authority. The papists forbid individuals to judge for themselves of the meaning of scripture, and require them to believe as the church believes. Nominal protestants may lay an improper stress on the opinion of individuals, or bodies of men, though they deny the existence of an infallible guide. Many set up their own reasonings and prejudices, in opposition to scripture authority. It is by the *faculty* of reason that we judge of the truth and meaning of scripture ; but we must not judge of particular doctrines by the *opinion* of our reason, or by some previous opinion that we supposed rational. It is by the *faculty* of sight we judge of optical glasses, but we must not judge of things shown us by the glass by what we see without it. Others have given heed to imaginary new revelations, made to themselves, or others, in addition or opposition to the word. Some, who are not aware what they are doing, have in a manner set aside the authority of scripture, by a dependance on immediate impulses, or sudden and powerful impressions on their imagination, whereby they conceive information is given them of things not previously revealed. Some, indeed, who give heed to such impressions,

imagine they honor the Bible, because the impression is made in the words of scripture. But still it is following a new revelation, if the thing taught was not originally contained in those words, or at least not contained in some part or other of the word of God.

If we regard the mere sound of scripture phrases, without our having respect to the connexion in which they stand, or examining their true import, we are in danger of being led astray. So are we liable to be deceived, if we lay the chief stress on the manner of their occurring to our minds, rather than on their original and abiding sense.

Our ground of dependance should be on the word itself, and not on any circumstances attending its impression on our minds; yet I have known good persons question the validity of the consolation received from the word, merely because they were *reading* it; i. e. because they were in the way of their duty!

THIRDLY: I would proceed, therefore, to lay down some useful rules to guard against these dangerous mistakes, especially arising from the latter sources.

First: The Bible says nothing to individuals, but what it says to all of the same character. Let us therefore consider, to what characters the different parts of the divine word are addressed.

Moral precepts are addressed to *men*, simply as rational, accountable creatures, and are universally obligatory. Not one law for the good, and another for the bad. *Positive precepts* are binding on all the seed of Abraham, and on all true believers.

Gospel invitations are addressed to *sinners*, described only by their wants and wretchedness, as necessitous, miserable, unworthy, and guilty. No need of a new revelation to warrant application to Christ.

The *descriptive promises* are made to true *believers* only, who are often described indeed by other graces, as well as principally by their cordial reception of Christ, or by their coming to God in his name, and sincerely acquiescing in his method of salvation. By this you should try your being in a justified state, and not by immediate suggestion unaccountably borne in on the mind.

If you are interested in Christ, all the promises are yours, that relate to spiritual and eternal blessings.

And as to temporal good, though God has

nowhere promised certain, uninterrupted prosperity, you have a sufficient provision for direction and consolation in that respect.

Secondly: Whatever one man sees in the Bible, would be seen by all others, if they had the same measure of spiritual light and correctness of judgment.

Thirdly: The issue of particular events cannot be ascertained by the old revelation, and we are not authorized to expect a new one.

Fourthly: It is much more to the honor of God, and the advantage of the Christian, to live by faith in the general promises of God to his people, than to be informed beforehand of the manner in which their trials should terminate. It promotes humility, resignation, self-denial; shows a greater strength of faith. So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and Daniel. But do we not set aside the work of the Spirit, by denying the importance and validity of impulses? By no means.

Fifthly: The influence of the Holy Spirit is needed and promised, not to reveal new truths, but to impress the heart with those already revealed, and to induce us honestly to apply them to our own case; to obey the precepts; to accept the invitations; to rely on the promises. Whether this effect is produced suddenly or slowly, while reading, hearing, praying, or at what time soever, this is the finger of God.

It is very desirable to have just ideas of these things: For what is chaff to the wheat? Yet some mistakes in time past will not prove all was wrong in your experience; but learn where to lay the stress in future. Not in a strong impression of words on the mind: that may be a natural effect of the memory or fancy, or Satan; or if the more immediate concurrence of providence, yet *that* is not the main point. Do you rightly understand, and embrace the word of God? So as to imaginary ideas attending Christ's sufferings: lay no stress here.

XLII.

THE REASONABLENESS OF CHRIST'S MEDIATION.

JER. xxx. 21.

And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them: and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me: for who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord.

OUR common translation has unhappily obscured this passage, by deviating from the Hebrew original, and following the Greek of the LXX. in making the first substantive plural. The Bishops' Bible renders it, "A Captayne also shall come of them, and a Prince shall spring out of the midst of them." And so the Geneva translation renders it, "Noble Ruler;" and I doubt not but it refers entirely to the Messiah, who is the captain of our salvation, the ruler in Israel. Mic. v. 2.

Some, indeed, suppose an immediate reference is made here to Zerubbabel, though considering him as a type of the Messiah; but I can hardly conceive that he is at all intended: the language seems too dignified to apply to any character inferior to the Son of God. We may however,

FIRST, Make some remarks on the reasonableness of the doctrine of Christ's mediation and satisfaction, as agreeing in some measure with the feelings and conduct of men.

Who is there that would not feel thus? If a person very dependant, and deeply indebted, should injure and abuse you, and obstinately persist in so doing, notwithstanding all you could do to reclaim him, convince him, or win him by new obligations, surely he might go on so long in this course, that you would afterward be unwilling to forgive him, (unless upon religious, evangelical considerations,) even though he should leave off his evil practices, and ask pardon: but if a much dearer friend, who had always been true to that character, and was a near relation of the offender, should intercede for him, and out of love to him, put himself to much expense, labor, and difficulty, and undergo great hardships and sufferings to procure his forgiveness at your hands; and if the person himself should change his mind, and beg

pardon for the sake of this common friend, who would not feel differently disposed, and ready to forgive him, for this intercessor's sake, though not for his own? Certainly, it is agreeable to the common feelings and practice of mankind, for those who are connected with a person of distinguished excellence and merit, to be treated differently on account of that relation, to what they would have been had no such relation subsisted. Who is there that has a singular love and esteem for a parent, that would not value the children the more for his sake? (David to Mephibosheth, for Jonathan.) And even more distant relations or friends, especially if it be known that the superior relation had a singular regard for the interest of the inferior; and would take what was done for him as done to himself. So Paul for Onesimus. Phil. xvii. 19. In this case, one person is, in some degree, substituted for the other; his merit is as it were imputed to him, and treated as if it belonged not only to the most worthy person, but also to his relation and friend. (Jonathan and Mephibosheth.) All this is the more conformed to our common ideas of propriety, in proportion to the nearness of *relation* between the parties, one of whom is supposed to recommend the other to favor; also the degree of *affection* by the superior to the inferior, and the interest he takes in his welfare: especially if he seriously and earnestly desire it, and that in such a degree as to be willing to promote or insure it at the greatest expense, by his own continued labor or extreme suffering. If he also apply particularly and earnestly to the person offended, whom he highly esteems, and who in the like manner has the highest value for him: and if he intercedes with him for the offender, whom he loves and pities, and whose cause he has made his own; yet in such a way as not to imply the slightest reflection on the offended, or any inclination to countenance the offender in his misconduct, to justify or excuse what he had done amiss. This must have the more weight if all was conducted with such wisdom and decorum, as would prevent any part of the transaction from lessening the idea of the Mediator's virtue; or rather if it was so contrived as to be a wonderful display of virtue, an exhibition of uncommon

excellence. (Judah's plea for Benjamin.) It would crown all, if the mediator aimed as much at the reformation of the offender, as at the prevention of his punishment and ruin.

SECONDLY: Show how fully these observations apply to the mediation of Christ, and give it unspeakable weight and efficacy.

The Mediator between God and man is a person of the most *exalted dignity*. Noble, glorious, excellent; (Ex. xv. 6.) glorious in power; glorious in holiness; the brightness of the Father's glory. The knowledge of him is excellent; to know him is eternal life. He thought it no robbery to be equal with God, and humbled himself by assuming the form of a servant. He is unspeakably near and dear to the *Father*; his associate; the joint partaker of Deity; his only-begotten and beloved Son, in whom the Father is justly well pleased; who ever did the things that pleased him, and sought no separate interest.

Yet he is also most closely related to *man*: became a partaker of our nature. (*Targum* of Jonathan. "And their king shall be anointed out of them, and their Messiah shall be revealed out of the midst of them.") The word was made flesh, and dwelt among us; he took not the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham.

He has uniformly shown the highest and most constant regard to the *divine glory*, and given his support to the *divine government*. Yet he has, at the same time, manifested the tenderest regard to the highest welfare and eternal happiness of his people.

He has *voluntarily* and earnestly engaged in his mediatorial work, and has his heart exceedingly set on accomplishing it.

He evidently thinks nothing too great to be done, or suffered, for the sake of accomplishing the redemption of his people.

He has absolutely united interests with them, and accounts their gain his own. He engages to become their surety.

The Father is fully acquainted with his desire, and Christ continues in the same mind since his sufferings; his love is not abated in the least, but he looks for his recompence

in their happiness, and ever lives to make intercession for them.

It is no disgrace to him that he has so far interested himself on the behalf of creatures so unworthy and guilty. And he has so managed the whole business as not to reflect on the law, or the Lawgiver; nor to palliate the conduct of sinners; nor to give the least countenance to sin.

He has given, in his prosecution of this affair, the strongest evidence of his love to righteousness, order, and purity; so that there never was an act of virtue, or a display of righteousness and holiness, equal to what he has made in this wonderful transaction.

He has not only paid the highest regard to God, and to his law himself, but he does not wish for the persons on whose behalf he has engaged, to be treated as interested in his atonement or merit, until they shall fall in with his views of the controversy between them and God; shall lay down their arms of hostility, renounce every other plea, and return unto God in his name; accounting it a privilege to be reduced to voluntary subjection, as well as to be received into favor.

The whole plan is infinitely acceptable to the Divine Father, who has insured the success of it, by the most absolute promise. *He shall draw near*; i. e. with success; they shall be accepted for his sake.

O that all may see the reasonableness, propriety, and beauty of this most prominent and important doctrine of revelation; which is so admirably calculated to glorify God, to pacify the conscience, and purify the heart of the believer.

May we look unto Jesus with admiration and hope; and rejoice that he who is so righteous, can yet be our Advocate with the Father, and make intercession for transgressors. He engaged his heart in this work.

O what an *arduous* work! He that is surety for strangers must smart. Our God is a consuming fire. What a *gracious* undertaking! They who needed such an interposition, could never deserve it. How vile were we to need such an intercessor, surety, and sacrifice; yet he was as averse to sin as the Father, and sin was as injurious and

offensive to him. What *wisdom* and *skill* were requisite to insure its success ! He must be wise indeed, who could draw near unto God, on such an errand, and not affront him.

O what sweet encouragement have sinners now to draw near unto God ! Behold the Son of God is your brother, and invites you to draw near, as Joseph did his brethren. You need not be afraid. Consider, his dignity and excellence ; relation ; hearty engagement ; certain success : having such an high priest, come boldly to the throne.

But ah ! If you are not willing to be indebted to him, not willing to come to him for life, what will you do ? Dare you undertake to approach God in your own name, and demand the reward promised to perfect obedience ? Dare you defy his omniscience to find any just cause of condemnation ? or his omnipotent arm to inflict the curse of his righteous law ? Or to what other refuge will you flee ? Call now, if there be any to answer ; to which of the saints wilt thou turn ? None of them can redeem his brother, or pay a ransom for his soul. The redemption of the soul is precious ; and there is no other sacrifice for sin, but the precious blood of Christ.

XLIII.

DESIRES AFTER WORLDLY GREATNESS CHECKED.

JER. xlv. 5.

And seekest thou great things for thyself ? Seek them not.

BARUCH, to whom these words were originally addressed, was a good man, the friend and amanuensis of the prophet Jeremiah : he lived at a time, when grievous calamities threatened the nation, which he saw indeed fully accomplished. Meanwhile, he was himself involved in the persecution that came upon Jeremiah, for his faithful admonitions and attempts to bring the people to repentance. And though once remarkably concealed by divine providence from the search of their adversaries, they were exposed to continual reproaches and injuries from a people that hated to be reformed.

On this account Baruch was ready to faint and despond ; and it seems that he endured his trials with the less patience, as he had indulged hopes of temporal prosperity and advancement ; perhaps excited by favor shown him at court in the reign of Josiah, or grounded on a consciousness of his talents, acquirements, and integrity ; but mixed with some degree of love to the world, and his reputation, and temporal interest. This disposition Jeremiah was commissioned to reprove, yet encouraging his companion to confide in divine providence, and annexing a peculiar promise of protection and preservation from violent death.

However suitable this admonition might be to the case of Baruch in particular, it is calculated to instruct us also, and may be very needful for other good men, as it was for him. “ And thou, seekest thou for thyself great things ? Seek them not.” Let us then consider,

The object and the propriety of this prohibition. Or, as the former clause is expressed interrogatively, shall we say, here is,

FIRST, An enquiry ; and we must ascertain the object of it. “ Great things for thyself.”

Baruch is not here reproved for his zeal for the divine glory, his grief at the low estate of religion, his earnest concern for its revival ; though in this case we should bow to the divine sovereignty ; yet without relaxing our endeavours ; and remember one soweth, and another reapeth. It is not in our power to command success, nor for us to know the times and seasons. Though Israel be not gathered, faithful servants shall be rewarded. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will fulfil his purposes.

He is not reproved, however, for seeking great things *for* God ; nor yet for seeking the great things *of* God ; a large measure of divine influence ; an ample enjoyment of the privileges of true saints. These things we may seek, we ought to seek, with the utmost earnestness. Diligence ; great grace ; faith ; love ; humility ; self-denial ; mortification ; steadfastness ; universal holiness ; heavenly mindedness. Open thy mouth wide, that thou mayest be filled with all the fulness of God. Eph. iii. 19. But the things here

referred to are *earthly* things, concerning which we are apt to err several ways.

As to the *measure* in which we desire them.—We are authorized to seek necessary supplies from God, and assured that our Heavenly Father knoweth we have need of these things. To this end, honest diligence in worldly business is enjoined, both in the Old Testament, and the New. The hand of the diligent, and the blessing of the Lord, maketh rich. Prov. x. 4. 22. See 1 Thess iv. 11. Eph. iv. 28. But while it is our duty to regard these injunctions, there are others equally needful. 1 John ii. 15. 1 Tim. vi. 6. But how prone are men to grasp after abundance ! How few pray, with Augur, “ Give me neither riches nor poverty ! ” Especially if they seem in the way to attain affluence. Much would have more, though unsanctified prosperity ruins many ; yet, how eager are even poor Christians sometimes after worldly honor, pleasure, profits ; and how evidently do they err.

As to the *manner* in which they are sought.—With inordinate anxiety, drawing off the mind from God ; leading to the neglect of our own souls, and their eternal welfare, and of more enduring substance ; treating the things of time as the chief good. Hence men are too often led to pursue them by unlawful means ; violating God’s commands, and injuring their neighbour ; at least if it can be done indirectly and unnoticed.

As to the *end* for which they desire them.—They seek great things for *self* ; aiming at self-applause, self-indulgence, self-interest ; whereas a Christian professes, and every rational creature is bound, to pursue a much higher object as his ultimate end, even the advancement of the divine glory. This is the highest, noblest, fittest, sweetest, and most profitable end at which any man can aim. Whatever end cannot be made subordinate to this is unlawful. The essence of our apostacy consists in preferring self to God ; and it is the best evidence of our recovery when we begin to do all to the glory of God. It is a tendency to this end that keeps the moral world in order. Selfishness introduces discord and confusion. As if, in the natural world, one of Jupiter’s moons should attempt to become the center of attraction,

even to the sun itself. Thus we are led to consider the reasons of the prohibition: as we observed, we have here,

SECONDLY, A prohibition; and we must examine the grounds of it. "*Seek them not.*"

Reflect how *unworthy* earthly things are of being called great, especially by those who are acquainted with greater, even with durable riches and righteousness. Worldly honors are often conferred on the unworthy. Of what value is a name from the worst judges of excellence? Of how little value are pleasures, which brutes, and worse than brutes can share, compared with holy pleasures! How does God throw contempt upon riches by giving them to many who cannot use them; who are rather the servants than the owners of a senseless metal. The scripture calls it *filthy* lucre, because it makes those who idolize it do so many dirty things, of which, if it were not for this fascination, they would be ashamed. Will not many, on a death-bed, lament they have taken too much pains to be great—great indeed only in name? True greatness, is to do without what others cannot bear to forego. Consider the *uncertainty* of earthly greatness. How few who seek it ever attain it! How many are the farther off through their eagerness after it! How *transient* is their nature! How often lost before death; and certainly must be parted with then. If then our all was on earth, how poor must we become! Consider the *perplexity* which accompanies them. Often is the rest of a laboring man sweeter than that of those who have large possessions; and especially than theirs who are anxiously pursuing the world. Especially, remember the danger of their proving a snare. "They that *will* be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." That is, those who are *bent* upon it, not all who *are* rich. The *love* of money, not money itself, is the root of all evil. But yet it is very needful to watch, however you come by your money, against the deceitfulness of riches. The more you have, the more you must account for. Yet great men often think the least of the day of account. Consider the *insufficiency* of worldly great-

ness to insure happiness. It cannot give content here, nor keep off death, nor insure future felicity. How *unnecessary* it is for you to be great in this world! "Better is a little which a righteous man hath, than the riches of many wicked." Little will do for a pilgrim. How little has sufficed for others; for prophets, apostles—Jesus, who made the world! How *unsuitable* is it to the Christian character, eagerly to seek great things for selfish ends! Not always the *being* great; (Joseph, Solomon, Daniel;) but treating earthly things as great things, ill comports with the idea of pilgrims and strangers; followers of Christ, and heirs of endless glory.

Let them that have the *least* in this world, be chiefly concerned to be rich in faith. Study submission, content, diligence, frugality, prudence, honesty. Beware of lightly running into debt. If involved at all, pay part, and so lessen the debt, and at least *own* it. Beware of envy and ingratitude. This is the way to adorn religion.

Let them that have *most* be jealous of themselves; careful how they use it; ready to part with it. Heb. xiii. 16. 1 Tim. vi. 17—19. If even you complain of the times, what must the poor! Set not your hearts on riches. "Riches, like briars and thorns, are good to stop gaps, not to make beds, unless you would lie down in sorrow."

All, seek first the kingdom of God. Depend only on saving your souls. Use all for God. Look to God in every action, change, and employ. Seek great grace to glorify God.

XLIV.

THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE HUMAN HEART.

EZEK. xvi. 2.

Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations.

It is the office of the Spirit to lead into all the truth; yet ministers must state, explain, and defend evangelical doctrine, be valiant for the truth, contend earnestly for the faith, keep back nothing profitable, and not shun to declare the whole counsel of God. The Holy Spirit is the Comforter, yet

ministers must take to themselves the charge addressed first to Isaiah. "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people." So in this case, though He only can effectually convince of sin, yet we must take this charge also to ourselves.

This commission, which was originally given to a Jewish prophet, seems indeed to have rendered his ministry unpopular. The children of his people were still talking against him, by the walls, and in the doors of the houses. Yet, if God gave him this charge, he was right to obey it : and as the end he had in view was the reformation and benefit of the people, it argued true benevolence to men, as well as fidelity to God, to fulfil it. And we must not forbear the like service, even though it should expose us to resentment and obloquy.

But have Christian ministers any occasion to imitate this example? Jerusalem was indeed the seat of the temple, and Judah the land of light, compared with the darkness of heathenism. Yet Jerusalem had her abominations, and was not sufficiently sensible of their evil. However, the light of that day was only as the twilight, or as the light of the moon ; whereas on us the Sun of righteousness has arisen. Can abominations be found in a Christian land? Or, if any exist, must they not be universally exposed and abhorred? Would to God we could affirm that Britain is free from abominable crimes ; or that there are none who endeavor to secrete, disguise, or palliate their abominations. But now, as well as in the days of Ezekiel, the friends of purity have reason to sigh and cry for the abominations of the land ; and we bless God, some such mourners may be found. But, at this time, we will not direct your attention to the sins of the nation, nor to those of the openly profane around us. We ought to bewail the sins we cannot prevent ; we should mourn for the sins of others ; but we ought above all, to lament our own sins, and to that end we should be willing to know our own abominations. I consider it as my bounden duty, and as an act of friendship, to assist you in the search. I would,

FIRST, Premise a few general observations.

All sin is an abomination in the sight of a holy God. All

mankind, even those who by profession, yea, even those who in reality, are the people of God, are chargeable with many abominations. Many abominations may be concealed

in the human heart, that are not fully known, or properly noticed. No sin, however secret, can be hid from God,

though some of the worst abominations may be hid from men. It is the duty of ministers to cause their hearers,

and especially professors, to know their abominations. Sin

is capable of various aggravations. Some are greater than others. Ezek. viii. 15. Object, subject, time, place, means, restraint, obligation, eagerness, repetition, continuance, consequences. God would have us notice the evil and

aggravation of sin. The more the temper and conduct of fallen creatures is tried and examined, the greater abominations will be found among them. It is necessary and

advantageous to know our own abominations. God is used to lead his own people gradually, farther and farther into the knowledge of the evil of sin.

SECONDLY: Let us take a view of some of the abominations of the human heart.

I shall not pick out such crimes as astonish mankind in general by their enormity; though I might justly assert, that many of these might easily be proved to be the genuine effect of that selfishness which reigns more secretly in every carnal mind; and that many a one, who, like Hazael, would be highly offended at the suspicion that he could be guilty of such excesses, would find himself guilty of the crimes at which he is now shocked, were his circumstances changed, and he left to act out all his heart.

Let us consider ourselves and others as to the *various relations* in which we stand to the Deity. How evident

his existence, power, and glory; yet how little is he in all our thoughts! Is he not our *Maker*, from whom we

derived our very being? How abominable to sin against him! Our *Preserver*, on whom we are continually

dependant, who loads us daily with his benefits? Our

Lawgiver and *Judge*, to whom the throne belongs; to whom we are most justly accountable, and must actually render an account?

Let us consider our contrariety to the *different branches* of the divine law. *Self*.—While self is the idol of the carnal mind, pursued without subordination to the divine glory, and without connexion with the general good, yet how preposterous is our self-love! How inattentive are men to their best interests, to their eternal welfare! While many sins are indulged injurious to present interest, how fatally is the soul neglected and injured!

Neighbour.—How do injustice, falsehood, dissimulation, envy, strife, unmercifulness, malice, and revenge abound! How many are chargeable with heart murder! If you could kill others with a wish, and keep it concealed! Uncharitableness and censoriousness, though you need so great allowances. How ready to receive and propagate ill reports! What pride, vile affections, and bitter passions!

God.—It is thought nothing of to give his place to another, and to treat him with absolute neglect. To prophane his name, his day; to neglect private devotion, and reading and hearing his word, are not supposed to be downright abominations. O what atheism, pride, contempt of God, disobedience, rebellion, and murmuring at providence! Many despise others for living like beasts, and forget that the lusts of the mind make us like Satan.

View men in the *different stages of life*. In *childhood and youth*.—How soon does a sinful nature discover itself! Selfishness, passion, gluttony, deceit, disobedience. What cause have we to pray, “Remember not the sins of my youth.” *Manhood*.—Passions more violent. Sin raging. *Old age*.—Too often an unsanctified heart, loving the remembrance of past sins. How stupid, hardened, earthly-minded, and covetous are some!

Consider the *different modes* of sinning. Thoughts are sinful, words worse, deeds more atrocious. Deeds are many, words more, thoughts most numerous. Our sins of commission are innumerable; sins of omission still more abundant; sinful deficiencies are constant. Never did we in any one act come up to the rule, as to the intenseness of our love to God, and zeal for his glory.

View men under the *different dispensations* of divine providence. Jerusalem’s sins were aggravated, both by special

mercies and special corrections : so ours. Under the reception of mercies, how ungrateful have we been ! how perpetually have God's bounties been abused ! And so under the reception of chastisement. What rebellion, or what hypocrisy do we discover ! Every fresh dispensation makes a new discovery of some abomination unseen before.

View men under the different *measures of light* which God has granted them, wherein it is most evident that he has acted sovereignly, in bestowing external advantages according to his good pleasure.

The *heathens* were inexcusable, in their idolatry and crimes against the light of nature. Rom. i. 20, 21. Paul gives an awful representation of the ancient heathens, which is confirmed by their own writings. Missionaries testify as bad of modern heathens.

The *Jews* are charged by Ezekiel and others, with worse abominations.

Christians have displayed most of all, the abominable evil of the human heart ; in corrupting so holy and excellent a religion ; denying the plainest and most essential truths ; or neglecting and abusing them while they are owned to be true.

Consider the different *discoveries of God in his word*. He has written to us the great things of his law. How evidently it is holy, just, and good ! How right that God should be loved supremely ! Never did sincere love to God make any one unhappy : it must have a contrary tendency. How right that God should regulate our conduct towards each other ! What good father could be indifferent how his children acted towards each other ? All approve that others should love them ; none think the law too strict in that respect. Yet how far are men from keeping this law ; how far from delighting in it ; how far from studying it, approving it ; how far from impartially examining themselves by it ! And yet how arrogantly expecting life by it !

He has made known to us the more glorious and gracious discoveries of the *gospel*, which is worthy of all acceptation. Yet how do men neglect so great salvation ! Many allow the incarnation and atonement, and yet are not surprised and charmed with it. Christ's coming into our world proved the occasion of displaying the utmost evil of the heart. He was not owned,

nor welcomed, nor loved ; but despised, rejected, crucified, and slain. And he is now neglected by multitudes, even of those who hear his gospel every week. It exceeds in glory, is full of grace ; yet, on his adversaries it pronounces an anathema.

View men according to the different *states of their minds*. Before any particular awakenings of conscience, how wholly are they taken up with the world ; how vile, profligate, and profane, are some ; how thoughtless, insensible, and careless, are others ; how full of practical atheism ; (Ps. xiv.) how regardless of their own souls, and a future state ; how inattentive to all admonition, as if preachers had no reference at all to them ; how stupid under awakening providences ! How God's glory is disregarded, his word neglected, his anger and favor contemned ; the awful terrors of his law despised ; his lovely gospel slighted ! How justly does the prophet speak of a heart of stone, and represent it as necessary for God to take it away.

When sinners are under divine awakenings, how do they at first endeavor to shun the light ! They would fain justify or excuse themselves, and at least palliate the evil of their transgressions ; they are loth to believe that their conduct is so criminal as the law declares, and the gospel implies ; they give up, perhaps, one sin at a time ; dispute, as it were the ground, inch by inch ; they are very reluctant to salvation by mere grace, and would fain find out some other method. They indulge hard thoughts of God ; low thoughts of Christ ; would fain come to him with some recommendation of their own ; lay their claim to his favor, and not own it to be absolutely free. Mere natural convictions are soon stifled. Sinners always resist the Holy Spirit, as far as they can ; if he were not almighty, none would be converted.

Abominations are found even after conversion. Sin still dwells within us, easily besets us, and wars against our souls. How imperfect is every right disposition ; how many inconsistencies are found in the best ; how often is Jesus wounded in the house of his friends ! How slothful, carnal, and worldly-minded, are many ! How unfruitful in every good work ; how little concerned to propagate the cause, and

promote the kingdom of Christ, far and near ! How ignorant and thoughtless ! How imposed on by Satan. How prone to formality, carnal security, and spiritual pride ; to presumption, unbelief, discontent, and murmuring ! How apt to grow lukewarm ; to leave our first love ; to backslide in heart, if not in life ; often on the point of total defection, or scandalous sin. The sins of believers, in some respects, are worse than others. Oh ! the lamentable fall of some ; barrenness of the best ! How little pressing forwards ; little love, faith, delight in God, self-denial, submission, activity, and heavenly mindedness ! What defects in our duties to men !

THIRDLY : The improvement we should make of this humiliating subject.

Though it is a melancholy view we have been contemplating, yet it may prove profitable. It should deeply humble and abase us before God ; it should excite deep repentance and abhorrence of sin ; it should excite us to watch against temptation, and be jealous of our own hearts. Cause us to abjure self-righteousness, and fly earnestly to Christ. Stir us up to fervent prayer for sanctifying grace. Induce us to admire free grace, and readily attribute all our salvation to it alone. Teach us candor towards others, when we see so much evil in ourselves ; and to pity our fellow-sinners, though we must not excuse sin in any. Let us be patient under injuries ; you have used God worse than any have used you. Long for heaven, where the spirits of the just are made perfect.

Study the law of God, and study your own hearts. Be willing to know your abominations. Attempt not to extenuate your sins, but notice all their aggravations ; only pray for a proportionate view of Christ.

Prize a searching ministry. Do not count us your enemies for telling you the truth ; but beg of God to make us more faithful, and to render our ministry successful to detect all the abominations of the heart. Pity the world that lies in wickedness.

XLV.

WHY WILL YE DIE?

EZEK. xxxiii. 11.

Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

As we have no doubt of the inspiration of the prophet Ezekiel, so we ought to have no doubt of the propriety of every expression which the Spirit of God led him to adopt. And though this address was primarily directed to the house of Israel, yet it was not confined to those of them that were eventually saved: on which account it appears to be equally applicable to all who come within the sound of the gospel. Certainly, there is no ground to restrain its import to temporal death, according to Jeremiah xxvii. 13. and, indeed, whatever argument would justify such an address, used by a prophet under divine direction, respecting temporal calamities, which God foreknew would overtake them, will equally justify God's directing his servants to use the like exhortation with sinners, respecting their eternal state. Thus also, as the fair proposal Moses was ordered to make to Sihon, (Deut. ii.) left him without excuse; so the invitations of the gospel, though addressed to many whom God does not induce to comply with them, are equally justifiable, and leave sinners altogether without excuse.

A varied emphasis may lead us to a fourfold improvement of this striking interrogation. Let me beg you,

FIRST, To consider the certain and awful consequences of sin. Why will ye die?

It is an indication of great depravity, that less interested motives have no weight with the generality of men; the excellency of God, the multitude of his benefits, the equity of his law, its tendency to the general good, &c. A sanction, however, is annexed, and that infinitely awful, though perfectly just. "The soul that sinneth shall die." "The wages of sin is death," even death eternal: not annihilation, but torment. We need not inquire respecting material fire: separation from God will be found bad enough, with the

company of sinners—and what sinners! The highest to be stripped of all pre-eminence, and exposed to the insults of the meanest! Here, you would scorn equality among the godly. Ah! how much worse will be the society of the lost! Such variations of character among sinners, will leave room for mutual contempt, insult, and recrimination. The passions unrestrained and ungratified! Conscience accusing, upbraiding, reflecting on former advantages! Oh! it is too awful! Surely this cannot be the object of any man's choice: though so often expressed as if it were. It is bad to call for God's blessing without meaning; much worse to call for his curse. Oh! if God took men at their word! No people so bad as the English in this respect. But whether you invoke it or not, death is the inevitable consequence of sin, and will soon come. Oh dreadful! Death is at hand; and the second death follows. What a change the moment after a sinner's death! How will his eyes be opened! his views altered! I entreat you,

SECONDLY, To reflect how voluntarily and obstinately sinners persist in the course that leads to death. Why *will* ye die?

Death is wilfully chosen in its *causes*. If you will sin, you must suffer. God has declared it, and if you believe the old serpent sooner than the living and true God, that is your fault. God has spoken in his holiness. He has showed what is good in his sight. He has declared what is the abominable thing that he hates. He has given fair warning in his word. He has sent ministers to enforce it, and has also confirmed it by his providence. He has made conscience speak sometimes, though you have rebelled against the light, and held fast deceit.

None go on in the way to ruin against their wills. You have chosen the way of transgression.

Alas! sinners labor harder for death, than for life. Yea, they may often shame Christians, while they act as if hell were to be taken by storm.

If not so outrageous in the pursuit of sinful indulgencies as some, yet you have wilfully neglected religion. Not only shall the openly wicked be turned into hell, but all who forget God. He that sinneth against Christ wrongeth his own soul; all that are

averse to his method of salvation seem to love death. See Prov. viii. 36. There is room then, to ask all unbelievers, all neglecters of the gospel, "*Why will ye die?*" None are debarred from access to Christ, who are willing to come to him for life. But if you reject him, you must die, as surely as an Israelite if he would not look to the brazen serpent. If you will not submit to be saved by grace, you must be sentenced to death by justice. If you do not like the blessings of the gospel, you must feel the curse of the law. If you reject the sacrifice of Christ, you must be sacrificed. If you will not have him to reign over you, you must be treated as his enemy. If you neither like prayer on earth, nor the songs of heaven, you must join the moans and blasphemies of hell. But I request you,

THIRDLY, To notice the fallacy of the inducements by which sinners are enticed, and of the excuses by which they palliate their conduct. *Why will ye die?*

Is sin so very pleasant? Can the pleasures of a drunkard, an epicure, a sensualist, compensate by a few hours of enjoyment, for an eternal bed in hell? 'Let me now have my bottle unrestrained, and I'll endure eternal thirst!' Are you sure to gain the temporal good you pursue? and if you were, is thirty or forty years' worldly gain beyond all the treasures of heaven? Are you sure that any distinction you can obtain here, will cause your companions in the world of misery to retain their respect for you there? How many sins do you get nothing by in this world! How much happier are true Christians, even here! Is the way of salvation so odious, so humiliating, that you cannot stoop to it? Are the difficulties of the way so formidable, that you cannot venture to enter on a religious life? Is it so terrible a thing to encounter the laugh of mad men; or so degrading to be associated with the followers of the Lamb? Is it worse to be ridiculed now, as very precise, or as very orthodox, or called a Methodist, or a Baptist, or any other name of reproach, than for God to laugh at your calamity and mock when your fear cometh? If your trials were likely to be ten times worse than you have room to expect, is heaven itself unable to compensate for them? I propose,

FOURTHLY, To urge a more particular application of the subject, by each individual. Why will *ye* die ?

If there be any occasional hearers, who seldom attend public worship, or do not often hear the gospel ; now you have been warned. I have set before you life and death ; death as the wages of sin, life as the free gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. O remember, and search the scriptures. Keep the Sabbath. Hear the word. Ye who have so often heard the gospel, do you never lay it to heart ? Are you never convinced ? Do you never feel ? Does it never last till you get home ? Does it never drive you to your knees ? Oh ! that it might bring you to be decided characters.

You old people, how long will you delay ? Can you find no time for God yet ? How many years are unexpired of the lease of your life ? If you have no lease, how long will you run the risque of dying before you begin to mind your chief end ? Are you waiting for a palsy to confine you to your chamber, before you can call off your attention from this world to another ?

You young creatures, that have already begun to show your aversion to God, and to provoke him to anger, Why will *ye* die ? You are not too young to be considered as accountable creatures, not too young to die, not too young to be converted and made happy.

Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways. Your immediate duty is repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Repent and believe the gospel. Acknowledge that sin is an evil and bitter thing. Seek pardon and salvation through the blood of the Lamb. The Saviour waits to be gracious ; he will in no wise cast out. God delighteth in showing mercy. Yet there is room. O flee for refuge. Cast in your lot with us. We address you as Moses addressed Hobab : “ Come with us, and we will surely do you good ; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.” If you accept the invitation, angels will rejoice. “ There is joy in heaven, among the angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth.”

XLVI.

BELSHAZZAR'S WARNING.

DAN. v. 25.

And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

BELSHAZZAR, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was a profane and luxurious prince; against whom God raised up Cyrus, king of Persia, who, in conjunction with Darius the Mede, his uncle, besieged Babylon. That city was so strongly fortified, that Belshazzar and his princes thought it altogether impregnable. Nor does it appear how it could have been taken but by the stratagem which actually was employed. The Medes and Persians, by immense labor, drained off the waters of the river, and crept in under the wall, along the bed of the river. Even then, all this labor would have been vain, had not the Babylonians, in their drunken revel, left open the brazen gates, at the end of every street which came down to the water. But Isaiah had predicted these very circumstances near two hundred years beforehand. (Isa. xlv. 1.) And Belshazzar hastened on his ruin by the insult he offered, that night in which he was slain, to the God of Israel. See ver. 1—5, &c.

This was a very awful warning, and though it came too late to him, the catastrophe that followed so soon, should make it the more impressive to us. For what was in this case written to him in strange characters on the wall, is legibly addressed to every Christless sinner in the scriptures; and every word may be justly interpreted in such a latitude, as to include us all in the solemn admonition.

FIRST: *Mene, Mene.* “*He hath numbered,*” &c.

God, who numbers the days of the proudest monarchs, and limits the duration of the greatest empires, has in like manner settled the bounds of every sinner's career, and will finish the days of his reprieve, as soon as the measure of his iniquity is full. “Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth; are not his days like the days of an hireling? His days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass.” These

bounds are not known to others, though we are pretty sure about seventy years will terminate the best of them, and by far the majority come very short. O that you were evidently concerned so to number your days as to apply your hearts to wisdom. Consider how short your time is—near half spent in sleep—how much more in merely feeding the body—how much more in trifles—how much in flagrant sin! Ah! it would be easy to count all the days you have spent in serving God, in attempting to answer the end of your existence, in minding your own main interests, in earnestly glorifying God, or seeking to enjoy him. Some know they never spent an hour thus yet. God has numbered your days of unregeneracy; and if you turn to-day to him, you will not have so much time (many of you) to serve God, as you gave Satan. God

has numbered your Sabbaths: some have had above two thousand Sabbaths, and never yet improved one, in forty years.

God has numbered your sins: he lets some go on in sin twelve years, some twenty, some thirty, some fifty years, ere he says, "Cut them down." You cannot guess when your measure will be filled up. Every moment a Christless sinner is out of hell, he enjoys upon sufferance; he is condemned already, only reprieved during the pleasure of the King of kings.

And yet, how will infatuated sinners still procrastinate, even when grey hairs are here and there upon them! Or after some deadly disease has seized their constitution. One delay is commonly pregnant with another, and that with a train of them, which often last till he sinks into the abyss.

SECONDLY: "*Tekel. Thou art weighed in the balance, and found wanting.*"

God, who weighs in an impartial balance the guilt of empires, and dooms them to destruction when their appointed hour is come, will also exactly weigh the moral worth of the individual, and detect every defect, and deal with the Christless soul according to his true demerit. Weigh then thyself in the balance of the sanctuary, O sinner, and seriously examine thy character and conduct. Study the rule of duty, and examine if thou canst stand before God on the ground or the covenant of *works*. Notice the 23d verse, and

ask conscience if the charge against Belshazzar is not applicable to thee. What hast thou ever done for God, with a single eye to his glory? Has he had all the heart, all the soul, all the mind, or been served with all the strength? What will make amends for this defect?

Will a little selfish honesty, or partial, instinctive benevolence? Nay, God required more of thee, for fellow-men, than ever was given by thee—genuine, disinterested love. What will make amends? Will repentance?

Tears pay no debt. Repentance is neither the obedience demanded by the law, nor its curse. Repentance implies an acknowledgment of demerit: will this justify? The best thing in repentance is a return to obedience; but this makes no amends for past rebellion. “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” What then will do? Look unto

Jesus, not as a partial Saviour, just to make amends for defects, but a complete one. He is the end of the law. Examine if you be in the faith. Is he your only trust? Is your faith cordial and vital? What are its concomitants? What its fruits? Does it work by love, overcome the world, unite with Christ in the design of his mediation? O be not deceived! Boast not of a false gift, lest thou be weighed in the balance and found wanting. Christ must be all, and be all in you, or else you will be found wanting.

THIRDLY: “*Upharsin. And they have divided.*”

God, who divided the mighty empire of Babylon, and gave it to the Medes and Persians, will also divide asunder the sinner at the day of death, and consign body and soul to their righteous doom. Sinner, thou shalt soon be divided

from thy wicked companions; thou wilt meet them again in hell before long. Thou shalt be divided from the people of God, and that for ever. No more will they burden you with their counsels, nor shalt thou vex them by thy vile conversation. Thou shalt be divided from thine idolized enjoyments; divided from thy false hopes. Body and soul shall be divided; the one given to the loathsome worms, the other to those cruel spirits, whom thou hast listened to as thy tempters, and to whom thou shalt be consigned as thy tor-

mentors. And when body and soul are re-united, thou wouldst gladly sink back into thy grave, or be buried under falling mountains, rather than meet him as a Judge, whom thou didst reject as a Saviour. O then be warned to flee for refuge.

How long, O infatuated sinner, wilt thou abuse the patience of thy Maker? How long shall his forbearance, which ought to lead thee to repentance, encourage thee to affront him with new insults? Shall thy madness continue to kick at the goadings of conscience? Wilt thou trample on divine authority, and set the thunders of Jehovah at defiance, till they burst on thy head, and sink thee in eternal perdition? Do the admonitions of thy friends, the solemn warnings of ministers, and the many instances of mortality around thee, sound in thine ears, or strike thine eye, and assail thine heart in vain? Is it nothing to thee, that an omnipresent God beholds all thy conduct, scrutinizes thy inmost soul, and has engaged to bring every secret thing into judgment? Can neither the smoke, the fire, and the voice of God from Sinai appal thee; nor the bloody sweat of Gethsemane, the crimson stream which flowed upon Calvary, affect thy hard and impenitent heart? Shall the ambassadors of peace weep bitterly for thy obstinate rebellion; and wilt thou yet refuse to lay down thy impious arms of hostility? Shall they pray thee in Christ's stead to be reconciled unto God, and hear thee again and again reply, 'I will not have Immanuel to reign over me.' Art thou in love with eternal flames; dost thou aspire after everlasting burnings? Or, what is thy hope? Where is thy refuge, that the precious corner-stone God has laid in Zion should be to thee a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence? Where canst thou find a better shelter, than in that name which the believer accounts a strong tower? Or, who shall raise thee to higher happiness than he who came from the bosom of the Father, to seek and save the lost? He is able to save to the uttermost. He will in nowise cast out? Come to him, and thou shalt be safe. Persist in rejecting him, and thy damnation is inevitable.

XLVII.

THE BRIGHTNESS OF GOD'S GLORY, AND THE HIDINGS OF GOD'S POWER.

HAB. iii. 4.

And his brightness was as the light: he had horns coming out of his hand; and there was the hiding of his power.

THE prophet Habakkuk seems to have lived some time before the Babylonish captivity. He predicted the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, and the judgments of God which should afterwards overtake the victors themselves. This chapter is a poetical composition, like many of the Psalms; containing a prayer, or devotional exercise of the prophet, occasioned by the prospect of the Chaldean invasion; in which Habakkuk encourages himself, by the recollection of what God had formerly wrought for Israel, and expresses his confidence in the divine all-sufficiency under approaching calamities. In the text are two things which demand our attention.

FIRST: The prophet celebrates the brightness of the divine glory. See ver. 3. *And his brightness was as the light.*

There may, in this phrase, be an allusion to the visible brightness in the pillar of fire in the wilderness, which first appeared at the Red Sea; or, to the appearance on Mount Sinai, at giving the law; or, to the clouds of glory, which afterwards filled the temple, and rested on the mercy-seat. But if so, it is considered as emblematical of somewhat more spiritual and excellent.

If we consider God as to his *essential* glory, which is absolutely perfect, and ever the same, *his brightness is as the light*. Yea, God is light, perfect light, and in him is no darkness at all. 1 John i. 5. No ignorance error, spot, or blemish. He is perfect in knowledge, purity, and beauty.

So likewise as to his *manifestative*, or *declarative* glory, or the outward exhibition of his inward excellence, *his brightness is as the light*. Though the display of his glory to his creatures may admit of degrees, and is capable of increase, it is ever bright and beautiful. Every manifestation of it is so; but especially the more full displays of the gospel. God has used many ways to exhibit his

true character, and these various exhibitions have been just, uniform, and glorious. Though not all alike full and resplendent, there has never been any real inconsistency, or blemish attending them.

When he shone forth on Mount Sinai, and displayed his moral character in giving out his holy law, it was a good character that he exhibited; full of majesty, purity, rectitude, and goodness. The man who could contemplate it, without admiring its glory, must be dead to all moral excellence, and deserve to die for ever.

And when we view his character as displayed on Mount Calvary, in the death of his dear Son, there is nothing inconsistent, or unworthy in the divine character, as exhibited in those agonies. He is the same holy being still, no less zealous against sin, no less determined to support the honor of his law. On the contrary, justice appears more impartial, and vengeance more tremendous; though attended with the fullest display of grace, compassion, and pardoning mercy. O! that was an affecting, glorious light. He must have a heart of stone, who can view it unmoved. That pale face, disfigured with shameful spitting and bruises, outshines the sun.

In fact, all the discoveries God has made of himself are glorious. In his word and works, though our darkness often prevents our fully discerning his glory; and many are totally blind to it. But if any part of God's conduct does not display to us the perfection of wisdom, purity, and beauty, the fault is in us, not in him. We do not enter rightly into it. Depend upon it, some prejudice warps our judgment. There is somewhat vicious in our taste, which misleads us, or we should see it to be all bright as light.

When the eye of the mind is perfectly rectified, and freed from every vicious defect, and God's whole character and conduct impartially examined, it will surely appear infinitely bright.

It does so already in proportion as our hearts are rectified. It shines with unsullied glory in the eyes of saints above; and will be contemplated in heaven with ravishing delight to eternity.

Yea, it will at last so force itself upon the eyes of his enemies, that there will be no shunning the conviction of his perfect rectitude, though his holiness will not appear beautiful in their eyes. The

sight will not suit their disposition, but it will fully awaken their consciences. They will be forced to acknowledge God is blameless, though their corrupt inclinations remain opposed to his moral character.

SECONDLY: He acknowledges the concealment of the divine power, which is expressed, first figuratively, and then the figure is explained. *There was the hiding of his power.*

The Old-testament writers, and other eastern poets, use *horns* as the common emblem of strength, especially as exerted against enemies. Deut. xxxiii. 17. Ps. xviii. 1. Here it is said of the Almighty, *He had horns coming out of his hands*; which might therefore be occasionally concealed, and yet were ready at all times, for the annoyance and destruction of his enemies, as it seems afterward explained. *And there was the hiding of his power*; i. e. The most glorious exertions of God for Israel, when he brought them out of Egypt, were but the hiding of his power, rather than the full discovery of it, compared with succeeding displays of his glorious might, and especially if compared with the actual infinitude of his omnipotence. Yea, we might extend the observation farther, and more generally. All the operations of God hitherto are comparatively a concealment of his power. For example,

In the work of *creation*, almighty power has been exerted; but it has been with a kind of secrecy. Man did not exist to see it, at its first display. Possibly, angels might witness the creation of the material system, yet that was but a small part of what Omnipotence could effect. And now, when we contemplate the works of nature, God hides himself behind second causes. He works in all, yet he alone seems not to work. His power is a hidden power, which requires attention, and a right spirit to discover it.

So in the works of *providence*, he is incessantly employed; but his power is concealed, especially from superficial observers. Most men seek only their own will, but they unwillingly accomplish his. Even his enemies subserve his designs. He limits and restrains them, but they know it not. Meanwhile, he has an hiding place for his people; but it is in the secret place of the Most High. God's enemies seldom see where he hides his people, or how he protects and

supports them. And when he appears for them against their enemies, as he sometimes does very visibly, it is generally in a sudden, surprising, unexpected way, as though one should open his hands, and discover horns proceeding out of them, to beat down his foes before they were aware.

Even in the work of *redemption*, which really surpasses all the other works of God, his power was surprisingly concealed. Who could have thought it, when Jesus was laid in the manger, or when he was led as a lamb, that he was able to save and to destroy ; that he could have cast Pilate and all the Jewish Sanhedrim into hell in a moment ; or, that while his hands were nailed to the cross, he could recover the dying thief, and millions more from the powers of darkness ? *There, indeed, was the hiding of his power.* He seemed crucified through weakness ; but the salvation of the whole election of grace shall prove that the weakness of God is stronger than devils, men, or angels. All created strength could not affect what he then accomplished. And now, Omnipotence is engaged to finish the *application* of the salvation he purchased on the cross. And surely he must reign, increase, prevail over all opposition, and attain his glorious end completely.

What *comfort* does this subject afford to all the friends of God ! *His brightness is as the light.* He cannot err. His whole plan is clear before him, arranged by infinite wisdom and purity ; and he hath power absolutely infinite to execute it. All the displays of his power as yet have been rather the hiding of his power, than the full manifestation of it. His strength is so far from being exhausted, that it has not yet been all exerted. The God of Israel did not put forth all his might in his contest with Pharaoh, Og, Sihon, or the children of Anak ; in the wars of Jehovah with Amalek, or in conquering the seven devoted nations of Canaan. Yes, he has greater power than he exerted in dividing the Red Sea, or Jordan, or when he caused the sun and moon to stand still at the desire of Joshua, or made the stars fight against Sisera. He concealed more power than he displayed in the days of Cushan Rishathaim, or of Zeba and Zalmunna ; or when Dagon fell so repeatedly before the ark ;

or in Sampson ; or against Zerah the Ethiopian, or blaspheming Sennacharib.

All that he did for Israel in the wilderness, in the time of their judges, or their kings, at their return from Babylon, or afterwards, was but the hiding of his power.

Yea, all his victories over Pagan Rome, all the triumphs of truth in the *primitive* age, were by no means the utmost discoveries that could be made of his omnipotence. What was seen in the days of Nero, Diocletian, Julian, &c. in supporting his martyrs, and defeating their enemies, was but the hiding of his power.

So at the *Reformation* he displayed his power but in part ; he hid it in a measure. He could have done much more then, and intends to accomplish far greater events before the end of time. After a little while, he will conquer more numerous and more formidable enemies, and get more extensive and lasting victories, till at length every foe is put under the feet of the Captain of our salvation.

Let us not be discouraged then, even if things should seem to grow worse, and the opposers of God and truth should exalt themselves higher than ever. It will afford Omnipotence the nobler triumph. Christ must increase. He must reign, and be exalted in his own strength.

But what *terror* does this speak to the *ungodly* ! God's knowledge is *bright as light*. He knows most perfectly all your actions and your hearts. The inward springs of action cannot be concealed from him, though they may from fellow-men.

He *hides his power* at present, for now is the day of his *patience*. But the day of his *wrath* approaches, when he will make your plagues marvellous. If your wills are not soon subdued by efficacious grace, you will shortly be crushed by the power of his anger.

Indeed, to judicious observers, his power is now displayed in his forbearance. If God had not a strength and fortitude infinitely great, it would be doubtless far beyond him, to bear with mankind a minute longer. Such infinite provocations would be too much for any thing short of infinite patience. It is astonishing that he stays his hand, and refrains from cutting sinners off.

But it is what he will not always do. He will soon ease himself of his enemies, and avenge himself of his adversaries. Yes, he will show his wrath, and make his

power known upon the vessels of wrath, who are already fitted for destruction. He will let all the universe know the infinite aversion of his mind to sin; and show that he is infinitely more than a match for them that hate him. He will let them see how mad and infatuated they are, who after revolting from him without cause, persist in their rebellion, and reject his embassy of peace.

All the power he displayed in the destruction of Nadab and Abihu; of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; of Sodom and Gomorrah; or even of the old world at the time of the flood, was small, compared with the final ruin of the ungodly at the last day. Not one single enemy, open or secret, shall then escape.

Consider this, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of such an adversary. Agree with him quickly. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish when his wrath is kindled but a little." O flee for refuge while the door of hope is open. Jesus is able to save to the uttermost; and if a sinner could be found whom it required greater power to save, than all that went before him, Christ is assuredly able to save that soul.

XLVIII.

THE VISION OF ZECHARIAH.

ZECH. i. 18—21.

Then lifted I up mine eyes, and I saw, and behold, four horns. And I said unto the angel that talked with me, What be these? And he answered me, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem. And the Lord showed me four carpenters. Then said I, What come these to do? And he spake, saying, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head: but these are come to fray them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it.

THE prophet Zechariah here relates a vision, which was shown him with an evident view to his own consolation, and that of his people; who, notwithstanding their return from

captivity in Babylon, found themselves exposed to the attack of various enemies, both at a distance, (who endeavored to injure their cause with the court of Persia) and in their own neighbourhood, among the Samaritans, and the remnants of the heathen nations. They would also in future experience still more formidable attacks.

He lifted up his eyes, which had been attentively fixed on the preceding vision, being now called to notice a new scene.

And so he saw *four horns*, belonging to beasts, whose bodies were concealed by a dark cloud or mist, possibly; it being designed not to give a full and minute discovery of future events, but only a general hint. They had many enemies; some known, some concealed, some present, some future. God, however, knew and foreknew all; and could easily frustrate them.

Horns are a usual emblem of power, and used in the book of Daniel, as well as in the Revelations, to denote powers hostile to the church. Or, these horns might appear not as belonging to living animals; but in the hands of evil angels, being perhaps horns of iron, like those made by Zedekiah, the false prophet. 1 Kings xxii. 11.

These horns are said to be they that scattered, fanned, or tossed Judah, like wanton bullocks, which toss about their fodder; or attack the weaker cattle, and drive them from their food. Ezek. xxxiv. 21.

They scattered them, *so that no one could lift up his head*; the power of the Jews was no match for them, without divine interposition.

But the Lord showed him four carpenters, or smiths, workmen; a very general term, probably smiths may be the fittest; with significant instruments, hammers, saws, or files, to knock them out of the hands which held them, or saw them off the heads which bare them. They were prepared to fray them, overawe them, and cast them out.

Let us then,

FIRST, Inquire more particularly into the immediate and primary design of the vision.

It may indeed be questioned, whether the design of the vision is more *general*, though referring primarily to the Jewish church. Or, whether these four horns and four carpenters relate to four specific hostile powers, and four correspondent instruments of deliverance.

The horns must denote the more formidable enemies of the Jews, stirred up by the powers of darkness to attack and injure them, and having power and inclination to scatter them and keep them down. While the smiths denote the special agents of Providence, in either preventing or repelling the attack; by whose means the designs of the enemies were defeated, and their labor frustrated. While the divine goodness was to be acknowledged in raising up such instruments, and giving them their commission and success. Some suppose the four horns to refer to the four great monarchies, (like Daniel, ii. 7.) The Babylonian, the Mede and Persian, the Grecian, and the Roman. But this vision was later, and the first monarchy had been sometime destroyed. The second was favorable in the general; so was the third, through the interposition of Providence, till after it was divided; and the fourth was not *overawed*, nor *cast out*, but fully ejected the Jews from their own land, and dispersed them all the world over to this day.

Venema, (who published a Latin Commentary on this Prophecy in 1787, being then 90 years old,) thus explains them.

“*First*: The first horn refers to the *Babylonian*, not as having carried the Jews captive in the time of Nebuchadnezzar; but as the Jews still bore some traces of that calamity, not having fully recovered, and as at this very time the Babylonians were attempting to recover their former power; which, had they regained, would have rendered them again formidable to the Jews, and to other neighbouring nations. Darius Hystaspis was the first smith, in whose second year this prophecy was delivered, against whom Babylon revolted a few years afterward; and being taken after a siege of twenty months, through the craft of Zopyrus, he ordered its hundred gates to be pulled down, and walls demolished; three thousand impaled; the Jews escaping the calamities of this seige by warning. Zech. ii. 6, 7.

“*Secondly*: The *Persians* cannot be reckoned a scattering horn, absolutely considered, as to the habitual pursuit of the emperors; but some of their kings, as Cambyzes and Xerxes, under the influence of the Governors of the provinces, stirred up by the Samaritans, Arabians, Ammonites, and

Philistines, who repeatedly interrupted their re-building the city and temple; as they had done before this prophecy, (Ezra iv. 5, 6, 7. 24.) and afterward. Neh. i. 3. But Nehemiah himself was raised up to frustrate their designs, and the wall was fully repaired, and their prosperity established, and the horns of the Gentiles cast out.

“*Thirdly*: Another horn which threatened the destruction of Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem, was that wicked Haman, whose history is so well known to you all, who hoped to gore the nation to the heart, and push all the Jews out of the world. Mordecai, however, was the instrument of Providence to knock this tool of the devil out of his hands.

“*Fourthly*: Antiochus Epiphanes is reckoned the fourth horn, whose violent attacks were foretold by Daniel, viii. 34. xi. 36; and are recorded in Maccabees. Mattathias and his sons are prefigured by the fourth carpenter.”

Venema remarks, that the same mighty power and attentive care of God has appeared for his church, under the Christian dispensation; and especially for the reformed church, since its deliverance from mystical Babylon. Three very critical times and seasonable deliverances he mentions, and seems to expect a fourth to complete the historico-prophetical parallel. He notices,

“1. That soon after the death of Luther, *Charles V.* threatened to overthrow the Reformation, had not his designs been defeated, chiefly by the instrumentality of *Maurice*, of Saxony, and the liberty of the reformed church decreed by the treaty of Passau. In England, the protestants were severely goaded five years longer, till the death of Queen Mary.

“2. The House of Austria seemed on the very point of suppressing the Protestant cause, about 1620, had not Providence raised up *Gustavus Adolphus*, King of Sweden, to defeat the designs of the enemies of the Reformation.

“3. *Lewis XIV.* was a dreadful horn. He made a terrible attack on Holland in 1672, and overran great part of it; and in 1685, revoked the Edict of Nantz, and cruelly gored and scattered the French protestants; while *James II.* was driving on toward popery here. But *William III.* was the instru-

ment of Providence for delivering us, and defeating the designs of France against the Protestant cause, and liberties of Europe."

Whether these events, and any other yet future, are directly pointed out, by any typical analogy, they certainly accord with what we proposed to do.

SECONDLY: Notice the general import of the vision, and make a practical improvement of it.

First: The church of God has room to expect a succession of formidable opposers, even to such, as to all appearance, would threaten its utter ruin. The enemies of the church often seem powerful, merciless, and mischievous; bent upon scattering the people of God, and so oppressing them, that no one can lift up the head. Pagans, Mahometans, Papists, carnal persecuting Protestants, have scattered, fanned, and oppressed the church; but they have never been able to destroy it, or to suppress evangelical truth. And if any infidel power should attempt it, that attempt also shall be frustrated: it shall only serve to sift the chaff from the wheat.

Secondly: Whatever enemies may threaten the scattering or the ruin of the people of God, he is never at a loss for adequate instruments to overawe them, and cast them out. Yes, if instruments, of whatever kind, are needful, he can soon find them, and often uses those in checking the external enemies of his church, who mean nothing less than the promotion of his spiritual kingdom. However, the main benefit to his church arises, not from warriors or statesmen, but from the faithful preaching of his word, and the holy and exemplary lives of his people.

He that cares for the external welfare of his people, and who delivers them from oppressors and persecutors, is no less sufficient and faithful to deliver them from the attacks of the patrons of error, and the promoters of unchristian contests among themselves. Let us, then, abound in prayer, follow the things that make for peace, and whereby one may edify another. Remember, what the Chief Shepherd has said, in Ezekiel xxxiv. 12; and also in Isaiah liv. 17. We may often think the church is in imminent danger; but the gates of hell shall not prevail. Zech. ii. 5. ix. 10. See also

Mic. v. 7, 8 ; and Ps. xlv. throughout. When Luther heard any alarming tidings, he used to say, "Come, let us sing the 46th Psalm, and let our enemies do their worst." Zech. xii. 3. The gates of hell shall never prevail ; but all the craft and force of Abaddon shall be utterly confounded and discomfited.

XLIX.

BELIEVERS, MEN WONDERED AT.

ZECH. iii. 8.

For they are men wondered at.

ZECHARIAH, in the former part of the chapter, relates a vision, wherein he saw Joshua, the high priest of the Jews, standing before the angel of the Lord. Ver. 1—7. Perhaps he was herein to be considered as the representative of all the remnant of the people, who were returned from captivity. Nor would it be improper to view his case as an emblem of all true believers. But we must waive enlargement here.

This verse begins an address to Joshua and his companions ; the other priests and leaders of the people, his intimate associates ; perhaps not excluding the people in general, who had been his fellow-captives, and were now returned to Jerusalem, where they had been thus far prospered in their undertaking. This address is introductory to a promise of the coming of the Messiah, on which account these late mercies had been granted them.

But what we are to confine our attention to, at this time, is an assertion, or observation made by the way, respecting Joshua and his associates ; viz. "*They were men wondered at.*"

FIRST : Let us inquire into the import and ground of this declaration, as it respects those to whom it was primarily addressed. Joshua and his associates were "*men wondered at,*" by themselves, and one another, and by the very heathen around. The 136th Psalm immediately refers to these very persons, and is a sort of comment on the text.

First : Their marvellous deliverance from Babylonish captivity made them wondered at. That *after* they had

been captives in a distant land, for seventy years, the temple and city destroyed, the land left desolate, it seemed as if their God either had forgotten them, or could do nothing for them ; yet they should be thus restored ! And this by means of a heathen prince, who did not worship their God ; who had in so surprising a manner conquered the powerful people who detained them in captivity, and who now gave them liberty without hire or reward ; although they were a people so generally despised and hated by other nations ! This was cause of wonder to all. They themselves indeed knew that it had been predicted, and Cyrus by name foretold as the instrument, 170 years before the time. But this display of the divine foreknowledge and faithfulness must excite the greater wonder.

Secondly : Their attachment to their native country, and resolution in returning thither, made many wonder. Especially as most of them had never seen it before, and those who had, were so advanced in years. Many had been comfortably settled in Babylon ; and had room to hope that the prince who gave them leave to return, would protect them where they were, had they chosen to stay. But they had such reason for attachment to their God, as no other people had ; and they went back in obedience to his call, who had promised to restore them to their own country, and intended to make their return subservient to the manifestation of the Son of God in the flesh. And it was He who raised up their spirits to comply with the proclamation of Cyrus. Ezra i. 5. viii. 21, 22.

Thirdly : Their perseverance in the midst of hardships and perils. They were repeatedly interrupted after the death of Cyrus ; (Ezra iv. 6, 7.) in the time of Cambyses, his son, called Ahasuerus ; and of Smerdis, the magian, called Artaxerxes ; so that they were hindered from finishing the temple, till stirred up to resume their work by this prophet, in the reign of Darius Hystaspis. Ezra v. 1, 2. See also Hag. i. 14. Indeed they had good reason thus to persevere. Yet many wondered that they should do so.

Fourthly : Their preservation among such powerful and inveterate foes. Such were the Samaritans especially ; as

well as the Moabites, Ammonites, and Arabians ; who perpetually labored to harass them, and sometimes partially prevailed, but were not suffered to cut them off, nor could they succeed at this time. Ezra v. 5. And in the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus, in his seventh year, Ezra was sent, and some more of the captives with him : and Nehemiah, in his twentieth year, who found the wall of the city broken down, and the gates burnt ; and had much opposition to encounter. But he surmounted all by faith and zeal ; refusing to court the favor of the heathen, by encouraging forbidden alliances.

But be it observed, that the same principles which were thus operative in these men, had been felt by many before, and have been by many since. It was not a character entirely new and peculiar. David said, “ I am a wonder, (or prodigy,) to many.” So was Isaiah and his children. Yea, so were Noah, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Daniel, the three Jews, &c. And such were afterwards found among the Maccabees. And no less under the New Testament : Paul and the other apostles, the primitive Christians, and martyrs ; who were wondered at for love to Christ, and to one another. Yea, I may proceed,

SECONDLY, To show the ground there is to apply this character to all true believers.

First : Believers, like Joshua and his companions, are men wondered at, on account of the alteration made by converting grace. Greater, and more deserving admiration than the transition Israel experienced from Egyptian bondage, or Babylonian captivity. From such stupid carelessness to such thoughtful concern ; from sottish ignorance to the experimental knowledge of Christ ; from profaneness, or at least prayerlessness, to a life of prayer and praise ; from vain, self-confidence to entire self-renunciation ; from persecution or dislike of God’s people, to special love of the brethren ; from profligacy or formality, to new obedience.

Secondly : The strength of their attachment to the cause of Christ makes them wondered at. That they should be willing to forsake their former companions ; to be exposed to the scorn and rage of enemies ; to undergo the frown

and displeasure of beloved friends ; like Moses, to cast in their lot with a poor and despised people ; that they should find more sweetness in religious exercises, than they ever did in the pleasures of sin and worldly pursuits ; while many loved not their lives unto death.

Thirdly : The influence of religion on their whole behaviour. That the change should be so entire and abiding ; that they should not soon be weary, or willing to return to the world ; (Heb. xi. 15.) that such a change should be effected by such means ; i. e. by embracing certain unfashionable tenets, which perhaps they were taught by persons of no great note for worldly wisdom, learning, or eloquence ; and which are supposed, by careless observers, to have quite a contrary tendency. For example : They believe God's law to be holy, just, and good ; and yet they renounce all expectation of justification by their own obedience. They believe justification is not to be by works, expect to be saved by grace, and yet hate sin, and are zealous for good works. Many wonder that these things should take place together, and especially that the one should be found to promote the other. They wonder, people so regular and strict, should be always complaining of sin, as still dwelling within them ; that none are so careful to avoid sin, yet none so burdened with it.

Fourthly : The supports they experience under trials, afflictions, and death, cause them to be men wondered at. Often afflicted, yet enabled to rejoice in divine love. Thankful, when some spectators would think they had little to be thankful for. When they notice the world's hatred of them, and their love to mankind ; rendering good for evil ; praying for persecutors ; looking, at times, on death with pleasure ; at least, longing for what they know will not be enjoyed till then. Hence they are busy in the world, yet dead to it ; being crucified to it by the cross of Christ, they live here as strangers and pilgrims.

Yes, beloved, some such men there have been, even in modern times ; and I hope that some present have a little of this same religion. May it be our concern to live more answerably to our character, that all around may have reason

to wonder at the efficacy of grace in us. Let us pray earnestly for an increase of grace ; and often set before us the most eminent saints of old times as our patterns. Let us consider what cause we have to wonder at the Lord's sovereign favor to us : for that is the only thing that hath made us to differ. We were in bondage, and he wrought deliverance for us. It was his grace which wrought a new disposition in us, or else we were as opposite to God as could be. He hath enabled us, not only to stand against outward temptations and trials, but also to overcome more hidden dangers and secret conflicts, of which none knew but God and ourselves. O how marvellous has our preservation been ! Many have apostatized since we set out ; why not we ?

While some wonder at the believer's zeal for God, he is aware the Lord deserves much more at his hands. We have cause to wonder at our own coldness, inactivity, and ingratitude ! Ah ! if others knew our obligations, and yet knew all that passes in our hearts ! how wretchedly imperfect we are, and how often we contradict our professed principles ; they might well wonder.

How will saints wonder at each other, and at themselves, in the world above, when the whole church shall be presented spotless and faultless before the throne ! Then will holy angels say, to many a one who has been as poor as Lazarus, or once as polluted as the Corinthians, Art thou become like unto us !

L.

THE NECESSITY OF RIGHT INTENTIONS.

ZECH. vii. 5, 6.

Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned, in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me ? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves ?

THIS passage relates to a particular occasion. The Jews, during the Babylonish captivity, had voluntarily appointed

several annual fasts. One in the fourth month, in remembrance of breaking down the wall of Jerusalem; one in the fifth, in memory of the burning of the temple; another in the seventh, on the day in which Gedaliah was slain; another in the tenth, because in that month the seige of Jerusalem began. But, now an inquiry was made, probably by some who remained still in Babylon, whether they should continue the observance of these fasts, especially that of the fifth month, which seems to have been the greatest, seeing the city and temple were rebuilding. The inquiry is made in language, which appears to savor at once of boasting and complaint, which are too often united in the religion of the self-righteous, who pride themselves in those duties which they consider all the while as an hardship. And the answer evidently implies a charge of formality, hypocrisy, impenitence, and want of regard to the divine glory, in those who propounded the question, and in the majority of the people of the land, who are all put upon a serious examination of the springs of their actions, and reminded of the necessity and importance of a single eye to the glory of God. We, therefore, are taught to consider these questions as not confined to that special occasion, but should notice the manifest import of the passage as of general concern, and of singular weight. It will justly remind us of some very humbling truths. Oh! that we may not reject them, through prejudice or self-flattery. I propose,

FIRST, To prove that a right intention is absolutely essential to the acceptable performance of our duty.

As God is the first cause of our existence, so he ought to be the last end of our actions. He sees the heart; he looks to the springs of action. 1 Sam. ii. 3. He demands the heart. John iv. 24. Prov. xxiii. 26. He thinks nothing of our obedience without it. His law makes no allowance for disinclination. It is as much the duty of the knave to be honest, as for any man to be so; of the libidinous to be chaste; the liar to speak the truth; the wicked man to love God; the impenitent to repent; the self-righteous to embrace the gospel. God has not one law for good men, and another for bad; requiring somewhat less than real

conformity to the standard. His law, in all cases, extends not merely to the outward conduct, but takes notice of the *motive, manner, and end.*

The *motive* must be supreme love to God himself.

The *manner* must be regulated by his revealed will. As to the mere time and circumstances of such duties as are often to be repeated, we may lawfully fix on such seasons and places as are most convenient.

But all positive duties must be performed, according to the injunctions on which they are entirely founded: and by those persons only, and in that manner in which it is prescribed; or it may well be asked, "*Who hath required this at your hands?*"

The *end* must certainly be the divine glory.

SECONDLY: Show the worthlessness of all outward service, without these qualifications.

The blessed God makes no account of those services which are not done intentionally, with a regard to his will and glory.

He regards not external compliance with the letter of his law, where there is no intentional conformity to the spirit of the law.

There may be, indeed, a fair outward appearance, where there is no right inward spring of action.

Mere custom, education, or the influence of others, may lead a man to a regular course of attendance on worship, in this or the other mode.

Desire of worldly advantage, or love of human applause, may sometimes have the same effect.

Covetousness may keep a man from some sins, and pride from others: and the latter may stimulate to some duties.

A mercenary notion of merit, or mere slavish dread of hell, lies at the foundation of the religion of many.

Great zeal may be professed, and the person himself may be so blinded by it as to think he is very religious; while it is little else but pride, malice, envy, and revenge, which produces all that flame. As in the instances of Jehu and Saul of Tarsus.

THIRDLY: Consider the extent of this obligation, even to our civil and natural actions. See ver. 6.

This verse implies that it is a sin and a shame for any of us to live to himself; not only in our religious actions, but even in our temporal concerns.

It is God's will, and our duty and privilege, that we should eat and drink, and to do

whatever we do, not to ourselves, but with an eye to his glory. 1 Cor. x. 31. There is no possibility of equal enjoyment on any other plan. Hence, the sacrifice of the wicked is abomination, and even his plowing is said to be sin. Prov. xv. 8. xxi. 4. No rational creature has a right to live unto himself; but the obligations of believers are vastly increased.

FOURTHLY: Inquire into the evidence that a right intention is wanting in our actions.

As the text speaks of this as a very criminal defect, it is worth while to examine into the subject rigorously, and to mention some signs of the want of a right end, that we may try ourselves, both as to the *habitual* bias of our minds, and also as to the *actual* intention in present duties. It is certainly of great importance to examine frequently, closely, and impartially, what is the ruling end of our lives and actions. What is so generally and habitually. What

is so now, as to any present action, or pursuit. *Partiality* must be a strong evidence that we have not a right end. So Jehu abolished the worship of Baal, but not of the calves. It shows insincerity, if we aim not at *universal* conformity to the divine will. Devotion without morality, or morality without devotion. Ver. 9. If you regard God in one instance, why not in another? Certainly you mind something else more than him. *Self-righteousness* is

another evidence of not aiming at God's glory. What such persons do in religion, is not done to *God*, nor done as *duty*; for merit and duty are inconsistent ideas. What poor conceptions must they have of God, who think it such a mighty thing to comply with his will, or in any case to deny themselves, or take pains for his sake! Ver. 3. Repentance seems a *great thing* to them who are fully sensible of the ground of it.

You cannot go about to establish your own righteousness, without denying the perfection of the law, and the need of the gospel.

How then does this subject reprove all known and wilful hypocrisy! and not only so; but all the more secret influence of by-ends, and of unworthy motives, which often actuate us, unknown to ourselves! It also reproves carnality,

and the inordinate love of the world ; and ingratitude, in receiving the bounties of Providence without improving them for God.

How also does it reprove lukewarmness and indifference in religious services ! Did you do it unto me, with such a cold heart ? Not so Hezekiah. 2 Chr. xxxi. 20, 21. Nor Josiah. 2 Kings xxiii. 25.

Hence learn, *the amazing greatness of our sins*. Not only have those actions been sinful, which were against the letter of the law ; but all those, which, though good in appearance, and beneficial to others, yet did not spring from a right principle, and were not directed to a right end.

Alas ! how few actions have any good in them ! How many never did a right action in all their lives ! A man may do some *natural* good, and so may a shower of rain, or a heap of manure ; but nothing is *morally* good, without an eye to the blessed God.

What need then have we all of a better righteousness than our own, to justify us before God ; when our sins are so many and heinous, and our righteousness is so miserably defective !

Even the believer's obligations to Christ and free grace, are increasing every day, on account of daily mixtures and defects, for which he needs abundant pardon.

What need have we of the regenerating influences of the Holy Spirit, to produce in us a *right* spirit, that we may do any thing right in the sight of God ! And of constant supplies of his grace, that we may henceforward live, not to ourselves, but unto God !

LI.

THE HAPPY MOURNERS

MATT. v. 4.

Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

OUR blessed Lord, both in the text and context, is characterizing the heirs of spiritual bliss. We may remark of most, or of all of these characteristics, that they are such as would greatly disagree with the maxims of the world respecting this question, Who are they that enjoy real happiness ?

This is especially the case with the language of our text. "Blessed are they that mourn."

Nevertheless, we have reason to pay an implicit regard to our Lord's testimony: and, considering his authority as a sufficient ground of assent to the declaration, we shall only endeavor to examine into his meaning, without seeking for further proof than what will naturally arise from the explanation of the subject. We will therefore endeavor,

FIRST, To delineate the character of these happy mourners.

Certainly the blessing cannot belong to every sort of mourners, else who would be exempted? All men are mourners, at one time or other; but this is evidently designed to be a distinguishing characteristic. Many there are, whose mourning has no certain connexion with any future consolation.

All mourning has some connexion with sin. Had there been no sin, there would have been no sorrow. But some mourn *after* sin, some *through* sin, and some *for* sin.

Some mourn *after* the indulgence of their lusts, like Potiphar's wife—King Saul—Amnon—Ahab.

Others mourn under those natural evils which come upon them as the *consequences* of sin; and yet have no sense of the cause of their sufferings, see not the justice of God, and are not at all grieved that they have dishonored him. Or, if they are convinced that sin has been, or will be the cause of their sufferings, they continue nevertheless to love the practice of it.

Now, they that mourn only on these accounts, have no promise of their mourning being turned into joy. On the contrary, they have reason to consider their present sorrow as a pledge of eternal sorrow, anguish, tribulation, and woe.

But some there are who sorrow after a *godly* sort; and though they may often seem to have a larger share of sorrow than others, they are blessed. A divine pleasure is even now frequently mingled with their sorrows, which counterbalances their sorest outward trials; and ere long it shall be turned into unmixed and everlasting joy. It must, indeed, be allowed, that it is not all the sorrow of these persons which is of a

peculiar and distinguished nature. They have some sorrows which are simply *natural*, as well as a more spiritual sorrow. They, as well as others, have a natural sense of pain, and like others, have committed things worthy of death. They have known the fear of hell, and perhaps still feel it at times ; but when delivered from this, they still mourn upon other accounts. So also, though secured from future punishment, they are liable to paternal chastenings and trials, in the present state. And are exposed to injuries from their fellow-men, which they cannot but feel and mourn for at times. But though they are blessed, notwithstanding that mourning, *this* is not the proof of their being blessed ; this is not that mourning, which, by divine promise, is certainly connected with future consolation. But they have another subject of mourning, which, many times, excites greater grief than any outward calamity, and which often causes them to mourn when they are pretty free from any outward trouble. Sin itself is that for which they chiefly mourn ; sin, which is, indeed, the cause of all sorrow. But they mourn, not merely on account of its consequences, but of its intrinsic evil ; not for mere dread of punishment being inflicted, but because sin deserves it. They mourn, therefore, whether they expect actually to feel its consequences on themselves or not. They mourn, not only for what God has said he will do to the sinner, but for what the sinner has attempted to do against God. They mourn, whether they feel much of the calamities it has made men liable to in this present state, or not ; when they have least to trouble them from without, and enjoy a blessed peace within, still they mourn. They mourn most of all for their own sins, and that for *all* sin ; whether against God or men, before conversion or after ; whether reputable or scandalous among men ; whether visible in life, or secreted from mankind ; whether it be by way of excess, or by way of defect. Not only for attachment to idols ; but all want of love, zeal, and activity ; all coldness of affection, proneness to distrust, to murmur under crosses, to dishonor God by impatience, is to them a cause of grief. They mourn likewise for the sins of others, believers or unbelievers ; the sins of their native land, yea, of mankind at large, often affect them.

But especially they mourn when Christ is wounded in the house of his friends. The further they advance in religion, the more extensive and affecting are their views of sin and its evil, in general, and in themselves.

SECONDLY: Let me point out the sources of their consolation. "*They shall be comforted.*"

Do they mourn on account of God's dishonor by their sins? They are, and shall be comforted, to see the honor of the Lord fully restored, by the Son of God becoming obedient unto death.

Do they mourn that they were once miserable slaves of Satan? They shall be comforted with the prospect of perfect and complete redemption.

Do they mourn that they know so little of God, and enjoy so little of him at present? They shall be comforted with the expectation of beholding his face in righteousness, and finding in his presence fulness of joy.

Do they mourn that they are still so unlike their Redeemer? They shall be comforted with the prospect of being fully conformed to his image.

Do they mourn on account of present trials and afflictions? They shall be comforted, not only with the expectation of complete deliverance, but also that these trials shall be found to glory, and honor, and praise, at the appearance of Christ Jesus.

Do they mourn that they are here exposed to divers temptations, and often allured from God by lying vanities? They shall be comforted: God will bruise Satan shortly, and secure them from all his future attacks.

Do they mourn for imperfections of other true believers? They shall be comforted with the prospect of seeing every one of them made perfect in holiness, love, humility, knowledge, purity, and joy, for ever.

Do they mourn on account of hypocrites and apostates, who dishonor religion, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ? They shall be comforted, when they think there will be no such mixture in the church above.

Do they mourn to see the Redeemer slighted and despised by ungrateful men, who have taken occasion to degrade him, from his having once assumed the form of a servant? They shall be comforted, when at the day of judgment he shall appear in the form of God, so as to clearly determine who he is: nor

can any doubt more of his infinite dignity. Do they mourn to think how highly God's enemies have exalted themselves against him, at sundry times and in divers manners? They shall be comforted to see all enemies subdued under his feet.

Do they mourn for all the dishonor cast on God by the sin of man? They shall be comforted to see it all wiped off at last, most completely, and made the occasion of his getting glory.

Do they mourn at the instability of all things since the fall; that man at his best estate is but vanity; that truth is no longer triumphant; that the cause of God seems fluctuating, like the moon waxing and growing faint? They shall be comforted to find all brought at last to a fixed, settled, permanent state, secured from all mutation; when the righteous shall shine like the sun, with unabating lustre, for ever, in the kingdom of their Father.

LII.

CHRIST'S DISCIPLES, THE SALT OF THE EARTH.

MATT. v. 13.

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

IN the preceding chapters, our Lord lays down the characteristics of his true disciples; of all who are led by his Spirit, and shall be found heirs of eternal happiness. The difference between them and others, is owing, we believe, not to their native disposition, but to the influence of his grace on their hearts. But it is not, on that account, less needful to examine into our real character, and to be concerned to give, in our whole deportment, clear and decisive evidence that we answer to the description.

In this passage, our Lord, by a plain and easy metaphor, illustrates the peculiarity and usefulness of the true friends of the gospel; at the same time strongly suggesting the deplorable mistake of merely pretended Christians, and the awful consequences of self-deception in this case. There

can be no reason to confine this description to the apostles, nor to ministers, any more than the preceding beatitudes, or the following similitude of lights of the world, which appears applicable to Christians in general, by comparing the 14th and 16th verses of this chapter, with Phil. ii. 15. "Ye shine as lights in the world:" and Eph. ii. 10. "Created unto good works." Let us therefore consider,

FIRST, The character and usefulness of true Christians, who are here stiled, "*The salt of the earth.*" To enter fully into the import of this, we must notice what is more remotely implied, as well as what is directly asserted in this passage.

It implies that sin has reduced the moral world to a state of insipidity and corruption, tending fast to total dissolution. It has made the world good for nothing, and worse than nothing; for the world answers no end unless God is glorified in it: but here God is not glorified as God, but creatures are set up above him, and preferred before him. God is greatly dishonored by men in general: instead of his will being obeyed, it is continually contradicted; and if God had not interposed, all would tend to worse ruin.

The natural world was made and is preserved for the sake of the moral world. The earth would have been made in vain had it not been inhabited, and that by rational creatures. But it would be worse still to be filled with disobedient, rebellious intelligences, by whom the whole creation would be allured, and all its parts used as instruments of rebellion against its Maker.

Christians are the only means of keeping any right savor of God in his own world, and thereby preventing its total corruption; and consequently the natural world itself is preserved for their sakes. Thus are they the salt of the world.

The world is reduced, by the fall, into an *insipid* state; and only believers preserve a right savor of God in the world. One would expect a world made by God should be his temple, where every one should speak of his glory. What an insipid world without God! But true Christians are the only people who notice the display of his perfections. A world full of divine goodness should be full

of gratitude. What a tasteless world, all receiving from God, yet no one thankful to him ! Believers alone retain a savor of gratitude in this insipid world ! A world under the most equitable government might be expected to be all obedience. But here is no savor of rectitude and order, except what is preserved among a few Christians ; unless we so term a little insipid formality, without regard to the divine will. A world inhabited by finite and dependant creatures, should be full of humility and lowliness. But believers are the only examples of true humility. We might expect a world of spared rebels to be full of repentance. But how few are there whose consciences, whose conversation savors of true penitence ! We might hope a world blessed with the news of redemption would be full of faith. But the ambassadors of peace have bitterly exclaimed, "Lord who hath believed our report ?" Oh, what an insipid world would this be, devoid of evangelical religion ! had not the arm of the Lord been revealed to bring you to Christ, and make you the salt of the earth, to keep a savor of Christ ! We might think a world peopled by one family should abound with love. But how destitute would it be of disinterested benevolence, were not believers the salt of the earth ! A world full of spiritual, immortal beings, should savor of immortality. In what an insipid state must it be, if there were none governed by eternal motives ; if all hearts were engrossed by time ! But you, believers, are the salt of the earth ; to keep immortality and heaven from being quite forgotten.

But the moral world is not only become insipid—it is altogether *corrupt* ; instead of being full of a right taste, it is full of a very bad one ; which would spread more and more, did not God interpose to check it and rectify it, by means of this salt. Men are not only ignorant of God, but entertain and love false notions of him, and prefer idols before him. They are not only ungrateful ; but prone to murmuring at his providential government. They are not only negligent of his service, but enemies to his holy law : full of opposition and rebellion ; corrupted by pride, impenitence, and unbelief. They are disposed to justify themselves and reject the gospel ; full of disorderly affections, and bitter passions ; of impurity, unrighteousness, world-

liness, covetousness, falsehood, envy, strife, discord ; sins of all sorts. Oh, how do these mischiefs spread over all the globe ! Genuine Christianity alone can give them an effectual check. Did not God make use of this salt to prevent the direful effects of corruption, universal dissolution and destruction must follow. God himself must abominate the world he had made, and cast it out of his sight. And indeed, men's wickedness would destroy themselves and each other.

Thus Christians are the salt of the earth ; for there is no savor of wisdom, holiness, love, heavenly peace, and joy, but what is retained by a few real saints, who are chosen out of the world, redeemed from its vain conversation, called and renewed by divine grace ; who though in the world are not of it, but passing through it into eternal rest. Meanwhile, the men of the world wonder at them as men of singular taste ; they hate them, and cast them out, and evil intreat them, though the earth itself is preserved for their sakes ; and on their account are judgments often averted from the places where they dwell.

But may it be our concern to retain and spread our proper savor ! And let us not forget, that as salt is the greatest *preservative* in the natural world, its qualities are also penetrating and communicating ; and so is the holy, religious conversation of Christians. Let us consider,

SECONDLY, The worthless character and dangerous state of mere formal professors. "Salt is good : but if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be seasoned ? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill ; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

Nothing in the *natural* world would be more worthless than salt which had lost its savor : nothing in the *moral* world is more worthless than an unsavory Christian. An unholy saint is worse than tasteless salt ; he does not deserve the name, nor answer the end of his profession. He must be despised by God and man. He often is contemned by good and bad. If a professed believer, instead of preserving others, ensnare them by his sinful conversation, what a miserable wretch he is ! fit only to poison the world, and to please the

devil! How inconsistent are salt and corruption, God and Belial, Christ and sin, gospel truth and wicked practice! You say God is good, and act as if there were no excellence in him. You say the gospel is true, worthy of all acceptation, and act as if it were false. You say that Christ has magnified the law, and act as if he taught you to despise it. You say that you are seeking heaven, and act as if earth were better.

Unsavory and *impure* professors are the most useless, pernicious, and hopeless, of all characters. A professor who is very much conformed to the world, who has lost his first love, and has very little of the life and power of religion, is a most unprofitable creature, even though he should prove to be not absolutely destitute of the grace of God; even though he should be saved at last, it seems as if it would be well for the church, and for the world too, if he were removed from them. A man, who, under a peculiar profession of religion, is altogether formal, and wholly destitute of divine grace, is in a still more awful condition, and likely sooner or later to bring open dishonor on the gospel, and eventually to perish for ever. If we who are already members of evangelical churches are yet unconverted, there is less probability of our ever experiencing true conversion, than there is respecting those who never made any pretence to experimental religion. If a man professes to embrace gospel doctrines, and with much light in his head can openly or secretly indulge positive sin, and especially if he can so warp evangelical sentiments as to make himself easy in that wicked life, he is the worst and most hopeless character in the world. What room is there to tremble at Ezek. xxiv. 13, 14. "Because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee. I the Lord have spoken it: it shall come to pass, and I will do it; I will not go back, neither will I spare, neither will I repent; according to thy ways, and according to thy doings, shall they judge thee, saith the Lord God."

Dear brethren, let us learn from this representation, what manner of persons we ought to be, in all holy conversation and godliness. What obligations are we under, to purity of

conduct and spirituality of disposition ! Let it be perceived that we are the salt of the earth, by our peculiar savor of piety, love, zeal, obedience, resignation, humility, penitence, faith, holiness, brotherly kindness, pity to souls, and heavenly-mindedness. Show that you have a savor of heaven while you dwell upon earth. Show that you differ from the carnal mind as much as salt and dirt. Unite truth and holiness in your pursuits, and thus manifest the practical tendency of the gospel ; at the same time, remember who only made you to differ ; and remember your constant need of divine influence to enable you to answer this character.

Let ministers in particular, though not to the exclusion of Christians in general, be concerned for the good of others. You are the salt that should stop the progress of corruption, season an insipid world, and prevent its utter dissolution and ruin. He is poorly seasoned himself, who is unconcerned about spreading the savor of truth and virtue. O that we may subserve the propagation of evangelical religion ! Let this be our chief, yea, almost our only business. Let us be ashamed we have done so little, and have been so unsavory. " Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that it may minister grace to the hearers." Col. iv. 6. " Have salt in yourselves, and peace one with another." Mark ix. 50. All heartily concurring in the same blessed design ; praying God by us to diffuse the good savor of his name.

The world might learn from this representation, what obligations they are under to true Christians. Wicked men would be much more such, if no Christians lived among them ; and the divine patience would be soon exhausted.

LIII.

THE WORKERS OF INIQUITY REJECTED AT THE LAST DAY.

MATT. vii. 23.

*And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you :
depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

OUR Lord is here drawing to the close of his sermon on the Mount, which he concludes in a very close and practical

strain ; such as I fear, if he were to come again in disguise, would make some, who conceit themselves sound believers, reject him for a legal preacher. You will not, however, expect me to alter his words, nor to explain them away ; but will readily allow me to lay before you their true and obvious meaning.

He had said, in verse 21, “ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven : but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” There is a sense in which none can call Christ Lord, but by the Holy Spirit ; that is, cordially, as being willing he should have the full dominion over the soul. But that is not our Lord’s meaning here ; nor did he intend to suggest that people might so call him Lord, and then fall away ; for he will tell these he *never* knew them : but he here refers to a mere verbal profession. They who believe with the heart, ought to make confession with the mouth ; but no profession will be regarded, except what flows from the heart ; and no faith is sincere, but what works by love.

“ But he that doeth the will of my Father.” This declaration does not supercede the necessity of faith in Christ ; for this is the commandment of God, that we believe in his Son, and honor the Son even as we honor the Father. “ He that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, shall have everlasting life.” John vi. 40. The reason of this declaration, therefore, is not because Christians are to be justified before God by the merit of their works, but because true faith is always operative ; and we can have no evidence that our faith in Christ is genuine, unless we love to do God’s will.

He adds, in verse 22, “ Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name ? and in thy name have cast out devils ? and in thy name done many wonderful works ?” This shows us how far many will go, who will yet be rejected, however strong their confidence may be : they may deceive others, or deceive themselves ; but they cannot deceive their Judge.

But let us attend to the 23d verse, which teaches us this doctrine : *Jesus Christ, at the last day, will certainly disown all such professors of Christianity, as continue workers of iniquity.*

FIRST: Let us notice the awful fact supposed; namely, That some nominal Christians will be found insincere, and be disowned at last by Christ.

No reflecting man can doubt this, who admits a state of future punishment; because nothing more grossly evil can be committed by Mahometans or Pagans, than by some nominal Christians.

While many, whose lives are not scandalously immoral, call themselves Christians, on no better ground than others call themselves Musselmans.

Many who have some rational acquaintance with the external evidences of Christianity, grossly misconceive its principal doctrines.

And others, whose profession sounds evangelical, will be found upon trial, to be hypocritical.

Some of these are detected by the providence of God in the present life. By means of persecution, false teachers, afflictions, prosperity, or temptation.

And some will, probably, never be detected by men, till Christ himself shall discover them at the last day.

Many may be very zealous for gospel terms, who never enter into gospel ideas, nor fall in with the chief design of the gospel; never are concerned for God to be glorified, for the honor of his law to be supported, for sin to be condemned, and saved sinners united to God: though these things are the essential glory, and favorite end of the gospel.

SECONDLY: Let us consider the certain detection and rejection of all, who are workers of iniquity.

The reason why Christ will disown some of those, who once professed a regard for him, more or less, will be, that they are found workers of iniquity. All who are saved by him, had committed iniquity, or they would not need his mediation. Yea, some of them were chief sinners, notoriously vile and abandoned transgressors. 1 Tim. i. 16. 1 Cor. vi. 9—11.

All were so guilty, that nothing but the death of Christ could render their salvation consistent with the divine glory, and the general good. All will be conscious of enough to prove that their salvation is wholly of grace, and that they needed a great Saviour.

Even after conversion, they are conscious of sin, which still dwells within them. In many things they all offend. Many are their transgressions,

omissions, and defects. Sin too easily besets them. Yet true faith purifies the heart, and produces a real, ardent love to universal holiness, so that there is a plain distinction between saints and the workers of iniquity. But those are to be reckoned workers of iniquity, who habitually indulge themselves in the practice of known sin; whether it be directly against God or man; whether it be openly or secretly; or if it be but one sin, which they cannot part with: yea, though they should carefully abstain from the outward practice of any particular sin, yet if it be merely upon worldly motives, and not because their hearts are set against it by the cross of Christ, they will be found workers of iniquity.

Sin must be rendered universally hateful to us. We must long to have it mortified and subdued, or we shall be reckoned workers of iniquity. If our end, in embracing Christ, does not correspond with Christ's end in inviting us; even that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and bring us to God,—if we do not love and long for positive holiness, and that in its highest degree, even for absolute perfection; we are workers of iniquity.

And if this should be our case at last, it will appear that our conversion was never true and genuine. Let our knowledge be ever so great; the outward change, in some respects, what it may; our religious affections, painful or pleasurable, ever so high, various, orderly, and long continued: if, notwithstanding these things, we were never divorced from sin, we certainly were never united to Christ. They who do not hate evil, cannot love the true Christ of God; and must be separated from him, and from all his genuine disciples for ever.

It will be to no purpose for you to plead your baptism, or your church-membership; nor for us to plead our preaching, or our usefulness to others. You must depart, and so must I, if we be found workers of iniquity.

“*Depart from me!*” Whose language is this? That of a man like ourselves? Surely not. It seems a strong proof of his divinity. Though that is not our business at the present time. And yet the consideration of his *divinity* is in point too. For his word will be with authority. If he says, Depart! we must depart. If he said so to the largest planet

in our system, or to the sun itself, his word would be instantaneously fulfilled. Nor is his *humanity* less awful on this occasion. He will say this, who has assumed our nature. He that *made* man will have no mercy then. He that *was made* man will have none! What! will the Lamb speak such an angry word as this? Depart from me! Oh what anguish in the thought! Now he says, Come unto me! "Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness; I will bring near my righteousness: it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry." Lord save us from the dreadful doom! Take away all iniquity from us! Gather not our souls with sinners!

LIV.

THE BRUISED REED AND SMOKING FLAX.

MATT. xii. 20.

A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.

THIS passage is quoted from Isaiah xlii. 3. and applied by the Evangelist to our blessed Lord, to whom it undoubtedly belongs, and of whom it gives us a most true representation, calculated especially, to encourage the faith of weak believers. It contains,

FIRST, A metaphorical description of a distressed and gracious soul, represented by two comparisons.

First: A bruised reed.—A reed is a well known vegetable, remarkable for weakness, and shaken with every wind, and of little value. It is an image of weakness, frailty, worthlessness, helplessness, and distress.

They only can take the comfort of the Redeemer's all-sufficiency and gentleness, who have been made sensible of their utter weakness, insufficiency, and unworthiness; who can no longer stand in their own strength, nor do without constant support and succour. Such is the case of the truly convinced soul; who knows his own weakness and insufficiency, not merely in a natural, but a moral sense; not only as a dying creature, but as deserving death.

Such may be trodden under foot of men, on account of their outward meanness. And so much the more on account of their mental depression, and free acknowledgement of guilt. They may also be sorely crushed with a sense of their own unworthiness and vileness; their inability to stand in judgment; their insufficiency for every good work; and their unfitness to show forth his praise. They may be greatly bruised by temptations; and through fear of being rejected and cast off for ever.

Secondly : Smoking flax.—The allusion is probably to the wick of a candle dimly burning. This is an image of divine grace, either in its first beginning, or else when in a declining state.

Divine grace is often compared to light and fire; but here it is supposed to be concealed, or doubtful whether it will kindle into a flame or not. The flame of heavenly love enkindled in the heart, is in itself agreeable, useful, and spreading. But it is here supposed to be, at first, very small and deficient in its degree; consisting of little light, knowledge, love, life, hope, fervor, and holiness. Exposed also to danger, and apparently easy to be quenched: yea, perhaps, it seems as if it would expire of itself. It is attended with that which is disagreeable and offensive: a sense of guilt, and a conflict with depravity. So may the first effects of religion be unpleasant to the subjects of them; producing, in the new convert, sorrow, rather than sensible joy; complaint of ignorance, rather than positive light; fear, rather than lively, vigorous hope; a sense of hardness, rather than of softness. Its good effects may be much concealed from human view. Some secret groans and sighs are almost all it produces at first. A desire to listen to others, but afraid to speak to them. Many evils will be found opposing it, and combating with it. There is much that is really hateful and sinful in the same soul. And not much light, as yet, shining before men. There are frequent changes and fluctuations as to hopes and fears, and indeed as to every duty and grace. The trembling flame seems often ready to vanish, and yet is strangely kept from going out.

SECONDLY: A negative declaration of the Redeemer's compassion and tenderness. "A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench!"

More is intended here, than is expressed. It must break, if he will not strengthen it: or be quenched, if he keep not the flame alive. But such whose case has been described, shall find the Saviour very gentle and compassionate.

When here below, he assumed no outward pomp and majesty, to terrify the poor and wretched from applying to him for relief from their miseries; no forbidding austerity, or dreadful rigor, made them shun his presence, or keep their distance from him. He seemed harsh to the Syro-phœnician woman; but it was only to evince the strength of her faith.

He condescended to men of low degree; to blind beggars and to little children; and to teach such as had been the vilest characters.

And he is still the same. Poor, despised outcasts; yea, the very chief of sinners, find him so.

He binds up the broken-hearted, and cheers the disconsolate. They who see hell to be their due, are not the more likely to go thither on that account.

He will not break the bruised reed; nor will he sink the convinced sinner into despair.

But while he shows the exceeding sinfulness of sin, he gives assurance that his own blood cleanses from all sin. He has opened a fountain for sin and uncleanness.

He shows the sinner the insufficiency of his own righteousness; but then he brings near his perfect righteousness, and shows its sufficiency to justify the ungodly. He shows his case to be desperate in any other hands, but insures a perfect cure in his own.

He convinces him that he has no other refuge but in sovereign mercy, and that no other is needed.

He makes him feel his own weakness, and encourages him to depend on his strength.

He will not quench the smoking flax; nor will he slight the smallest beginnings of grace in the soul. Though it burns so dimly, or can scarcely be seen by others, yet he will not quench it, nor will he suffer it to be extinguished by others. He will shield the spark of love from all that would suppress it, and will fan it to a flame. He will cause it at

length to shine forth in beautiful lustre and strength, to the praise of him who first enkindled it.

THIRDLY: A positive assurance of his faithfulness and success. "He will send judgment unto victory." In Isaiah xlii. 3. it is, "He will bring forth judgment unto truth," which is translated by Bishop Lowth, "He shall publish judgment so as to establish it perfectly." It may include these ideas.

He shall render the acquittal of his people perfectly consistent with righteousness. So that neither shall their salvation, in the least, infringe upon the law and righteousness of God; nor shall the most righteous justice forbid the fulfilment of his amplest promises.

The Redeemer shall so thoroughly plead for his people, as to make the truth of their cause apparent, and get the victory over all their accusers and adversaries. Though often misrepresented and censured, charged with hypocrisy, with madness, with licentiousness, with turning the world upside down, with being enemies to morality, to civil government, and to mankind; yet he will clear their characters, prove their sincerity, their wisdom, their love to holiness, to peace, and to mankind. They studied to approve themselves to God, who searches the heart, and had "the testimony of a good conscience, that not in fleshly wisdom, but in simplicity and godly sincerity, they had their conversation in the world, as influenced by the grace of God." They were zealous for the practice of good works, though zealous against the doctrine of human merit. The love of Christ constrained them to depart from all iniquity, and inspired them with disinterested benevolence. As he will clear individuals; thus also the cause of evangelical truth shall at length mightily prevail over all its opposers.

May we admire the tenderness and grace of this blessed Saviour. And learn of him to be tender-hearted to distressed souls, and such as are newly awakened.

Let the feeble be encouraged to cry to him for strength. And let those that walk in darkness, look to him for light. He can dispel the smoke, and raise the spark to a sacred flame.

But let the self-righteous and self-sufficient expect to be broken. And let those who wish to hide themselves in darkness, expect to be detected. Let those who shine in their own eyes, expect their lamps to go out in obscure darkness.

LV.

JESUS AND JONAH COMPARED.

MATT. xii. 41.

Behold a greater than Jonah is here.

MATTHEW informs us, that certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees had been demanding a sign of our Lord, who replied, that no sign should be given but that of the prophet Jonah. Not only was our Lord's predicting his own death and resurrection, a sign of his being indeed a true prophet; but that resurrection, considered in all its circumstances, would be an evidence of his being the true Messiah, and of his having finished the great work of redemption, which he had undertaken to perform. But having thus had occasion to mention Jonah, he forewarned them, that the repentance of the men of Nineveh, at his preaching, would justify and aggravate the condemnation of the men of that generation, who enjoyed advantages far superior to theirs, as he himself was far superior to Jonah.

Knowing that whatsoever things are written in the scriptures, are written for our warning, and especially what they declare concerning the evil consequences of impenitence under the sound of the gospel, We will endeavor,

FIRST, To consider the contrast of the ministry of Jonah and of Jesus, with the different receptions they met with from their respective hearers.

I shall not now enlarge on the supreme dignity and true divinity of Jesus, on the one hand; nor on the remarkable defects of the prophet Jonah, on the other. Though Jonah was, in some respects, one of the most defective characters of all the Old-testament prophets; and Jesus, unspeakably superior to all who ever acted as the servants of God; I

shall chiefly mention such circumstances relative to each, as were most visible and apparent to their respective hearers.

Jonah was sent to a people brought up in heathenism, who had scarcely heard of the true God. *Jesus* was sent to the Jews, who considered themselves as God's peculiar people; and had, indeed, been long treated by him with peculiar distinction.

Jonah went to a people, who had had no preparatory instruction in true religion. *Jesus* came to a people, who by various extraordinary means, had been prepared for his coming.

Jonah's ministry and message were very short. The ministry of *Jesus* was much more full and continued.

Jonah was a stranger and a foreigner to the Ninevites. *Jesus* was acknowledged by the Jews to be their own countryman, and even of the race of their kings.

Jonah's message was all alarming. He only denounced approaching destruction. The message of *Jesus* was very alluring. He came to proclaim glad tidings of salvation.

Jonah gave his hearers no encouragement, except by a very obscure implication, which he himself was unwilling to admit. The ministry of *Jesus* was attended with kind invitations and express promises to all returning penitents.

Jonah wrought no miracles to confirm his message to the men of Nineveh. The ministry of *Jesus* was accompanied with many miracles; and almost all were miracles of mercy.

Jonah was very deficient in disinterested benevolence, and had little tenderness for the Ninevites. *Jesus* discovered much compassion for the Jews: (Luke xiii. 34. xix. 41, 42.) and for sinners in general.

The Ninevites repented at *Jonah's* preaching, we hope some of them savingly. The Jews rejected and murdered *Jesus*; and afterwards persecuted his disciples, till wrath came upon them to the uttermost.

SECONDLY: Inquire which case is most similar to our own, and how we should improve the subject?

Jesus Christ, has not, indeed, preached to you in person; but he has sent his servants among you, in his name. These servants of Christ have been commissioned, not like Jonah, merely to denounce destruction, but to proclaim salvation. It is not merely within these forty days, that you have been favored with the means of grace; but many of you have enjoyed from your childhood, the opportunity of hearing the word, reading it, and having it enforced at home. Have you not heard the terrors of the Lord? No time, indeed, has been set for the period of his patience. But you have had a further discovery of the awful consequences of sin, than the men of Nineveh. It may be, wrath will come within forty days; and it is more than temporal destruction which awaits the Christless sinner. You have had more particular representation of the evil of sin, as the cause of God's displeasure. By the law is the knowledge of sin. That law has been explained; and shown to be holy, just, and good. And you have had particular sins pointed out. You have had a variety of means employed with you. Every spring of action has been addressed in turn; your conscience, your reason, and your passions. Especially, you have had many gracious invitations and precious promises, to encourage your return to God. All the invitations in the Bible are for your encouragement; and if you embrace Christ, all the promises will be your portion. Christ has sent unto you a number of faithful ministers, who are affectionately desirous of your salvation. It would *not* be a disappointment to *them* to have your destruction prevented, as it seemed to be to Jonah as to Nineveh: but your rejection of Christ would be their grief; and your acceptance of him would fill their hearts with joy. There are, also, many Christians around you, who would rejoice in your salvation, perhaps your relations: if not, others would rejoice, even those whom you have sometimes reviled and persecuted: and Christ assures us, that the angels in heaven would rejoice. True, you have not seen any miracles, as Christ's hearers did; but you have a full account of many which he wrought, and an account of his death and resurrection. You have fewer stumbling-blocks in your way, than they had who lived in the days of his flesh. Some

evidences of Christ have greater force now than then: the argument from prophecy, and from the success of the gospel. Many miracles of grace may be seen in this day to confirm the doctrine of God our Saviour. “The blind see, the deaf hear, lepers are cleansed, the poor receive the gospel.”

From all this, it follows, that if you embrace not the gospel, the men of Nineveh will assuredly condemn you, as they did those who heard our Lord himself.

But you profess that you do believe it. Yes! but with what kind of faith? Is it genuine and cordial? Have you received the truth in the love of it? What effect has it had on your hearts and lives? No faith is genuine that is not attended with repentance. You cannot rely on Christ, without you see your need of him; you cannot see your need of him, unless you see sin to be sinful. He surely had no need to die for you, if you never deserved to die yourself. And certainly you cannot see the great evil of sin, and the indispensable need of Christ's atonement, and yet love sin. You cannot hate sin, and yet commit it greedily, or not desire its utter destruction. You cannot sincerely love Christ, unless you unite cordially with him in all the ends of his mediation. Examine how this is. Confess how averse you once were to the design of the gospel. Give God the praise, if you have repented and believed.

LVI.

JESUS AND SOLOMON COMPARED.

MATT. xii. 42.

Behold a greater than Solomon is here.

THE blessed Jesus is proposed by the Apostle Paul, in the second chapter of his Epistle to the Phillipians, as the greatest pattern of humility that could be named. But surely they who deny his proper deity, and infinite original dignity, take off all the force of this example, and leave little room to admire his condescension. According to *them*, the most that can be said of his modesty is this, that being merely a man he did not think of the robbery of being equal

with God! But surely, if he were of no superior nature to the rest of mankind, he must have bordered on that robbery in several instances. Matt. ix. 2. xi. 27. xii. 6. 8. Yea, had he been but a mere man, our text itself would seem sufficiently arrogant. Other servants of God are taught to esteem others better than themselves. But Jesus often speaks of himself as superior to all who either preceded or should succeed him. "Before Abraham was I am." "Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad." "Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." "Moses spake of me." "Ye call me Lord and Master, and so I am." John viii. 58. 56. Luke x. 24. Matt. xiii. 17. John v. 46. xiii. 13. In the context, he asserts that he was greater than Jonah, who had most success in reforming the Gentiles. And in the text, that he was greater than Solomon, the greatest of all the princes of the house of David, the greatest king of the Jews, and in some respects the first monarch in the world. Our principal business will be,

FIRST, To evince the superiority of Christ to Solomon. He did not appear so at first sight, to all beholders; yet he really possessed the excellencies for which Solomon was most celebrated, and that in a superior degree; and other excellencies of which Solomon was wholly destitute.

He was greater than Solomon in *essential dignity*. He was, according to the flesh, descended from the same stock: he was of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Judah, of the family of David; and David, as well as his ancestors, was more honored by this remote descendant than by his immediate son and successor. God raised that family to the throne, that he might make the line more conspicuous from which the Messiah should spring; and that this line of kings who reigned over his chosen people, might typify the royalty of his Son, who being the Son of God, and so God himself, was David's Lord.

He was greater than Solomon in *personal qualities*. Infinitely more excellent and amiable in moral character. He

was absolutely perfect, which Solomon was far from being. He was "the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely."

He was possessed of *greater wisdom* than Solomon, though all his wisdom was unostentatious and useful. Much of Solomon's wisdom was merely political, or at least temporal only. But Christ's wisdom was spiritual and heavenly. Solomon's wisdom was mixed with folly. Not so Christ's. He has all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Col. ii. 3. Solomon could not certainly communicate his wisdom, no, not even to his own son Rehoboam. But Christ makes all his people wise unto salvation.

Solomon was renowned for his *peaceful* reign, but he was never great in *war*. The latter circumstance indeed is no degradation of him. But it is an exaltation of Christ, that in righteousness doth he judge and make war, and his victories are great and glorious.

And yet he is a greater friend to *peace* than Solomon. He is the Prince of peace. He made peace by the blood of his cross; reconciles sinners unto God; and gives peace of conscience; such peace as the world cannot give or take away.

Solomon was immensely *rich*. 1 Kings x. 21. Christ appeared in our world as extremely *poor*. When he that made the world dwelt in it for a little season, the character in which he chose to appear was that of a poor, godly man. Yet his *riches* exceed those of Solomon, and are far more valuable and durable. In his kingdom temporal riches are of little account. Those riches only that cannot be destroyed by the last conflagration, are worthy to be valued by his subjects.

Solomon's empire was *widely extended*. But Christ is a much greater monarch than Solomon. His dominions are infinitely more extensive. But the great excellence of Christ's kingdom consists in its being internal and spiritual. Its seat is in the heart. Also his administration is more perfectly righteous. His laws are more wise and equitable than even Solomon's. His subjects are more prosperous and happy. He has done much greater things for his people

than ever Solomon did for his subjects. Solomon never risked his life for Israel, as David had often done. But Christ laid down his life for his people. Solomon could not insure continued tranquillity and prosperity to his people; for he died when he had reigned but forty years. But Jesus lives and reigns for ever.

Solomon was one that *loved God*, and was honored by him in being appointed to build the temple. But his love was defective and grew cold; and after he had erected the temple he fell into idolatry. Jesus had far more love to God, and zeal for his glory. He has also built a much more glorious temple, a spiritual building, which shall never be destroyed.

The *honor* and *fame* of our blessed Lord, and the *usefulness* and *success* of his achievements, evince that he is greater than Solomon. Solomon had people who came to him from all quarters for instruction, and this tended to the honor of the God of Israel. 1 Kings viii. 42. 60. But God never honored him as the instrument of any such great revolution in the earth as Christ has accomplished: he never effected the conversion of one heathen nation. Whereas Christ's gospel has already destroyed heathenism in more than twenty times the extent of Solomon's empire. And in him the whole of the Seventy-second Psalm shall be fully accomplished. Ver. 7. 8. 17. 19. I proceed,

SECONDLY: To consider the improvement we should make of this doctrine.

Let us admire the glory of our blessed Lord, submit to his authority, delight in his service, and pay diligent attention to his instructions.

To enforce this duty let us consider, how justly we may expect that they who despise the wisdom of Jesus will be exposed to the most severe condemnation. Yes, the Queen of Sheba will condemn, not only the men of *that* generation, but the men of *this* generation also, for their neglect of Christ. Though he be not now upon earth, yet he continues to speak to us, even from his throne in heaven. And if it was so great a sin to despise him in his state of humiliation, surely it is no less to despise him in his state of exaltation.

Heb. xii. 25. What a confirmation is it of the truth of our Lord's Messiahship, that his gospel has been so succeeded, and has had the very effects which God had foretold should be produced by the Messiah. It was foretold that he should enlighten the Gentiles and abolish the idols, and that the gods that had not made the heavens should perish. And so it has come to pass. The heathen gods are exploded, the God of Israel is acknowledged by many nations, and all in consequence of Christ's coming; though Solomon could do so little to this effect. The true God was worshipped by Israel in Canaan but 1450 years. They entered Canaan 1451 before Christ; endured seventy years captivity; and continued after their return seventy years after Christ. But now he has been worshipped by many Gentiles above three hundred years longer than by Israel in their own land. How can the *Jews* account for it, that God should have so honored Jesus if he were an impostor; and that he should at the same time punish their nation so terribly? Or how can *we* avoid the force of the argument, from the fulfilment of prophecy in Jesus of Nazareth, and the attestation of Providence to his gospel? And if we admit that he is indeed the true Messiah, how can we excuse our neglect of his great salvation? our despising his counsel, and contemning him who who is the power of God, and the wisdom of God, to every one who believes. See Luke xi. 32. The men of Nineveh will condemn us; who received so short a message, with so little encouragement, and by a messenger possessed of so little benevolence.

But verily, they who come to Christ, and hear his wisdom, and see his glory, will have room to say with the Queen of Sheba, (1 Kings x. 6—8.) "It was a true report that I heard in mine own land, of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit, I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard. Happy are thy men; happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom."

LVII.

SINFUL DOUBTS.

MATT. xiv. 31.

O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

THESE words were addressed by our Lord to the apostle Peter, who, beholding Jesus walking on the water, first requested a commission to come to meet him; and then, though authorized to venture, and miraculously supported, yet, seeing the wind boisterous and the waves agitated, began to fear, and then to sink; our Saviour proportioning the buoyancy of his body to the exercise of his faith: but as soon as he cried to him for aid, the Lord stretched forth his hand to support him, changing the practical reproof of the weakness of his faith, for this gentle verbal one, *O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?*

A reproof it was, but an encouraging one; and though immediately addressed to Peter, yet it is calculated for our instruction, and may both shame and encourage others, as far as their character and circumstances resemble the Apostle's.

The connexion indeed, will warn us of the mixture there may be of both *presumption* and *unbelief*, even in true believers; for it seems probable that Peter was infected with some degree of both those evils; and extremes will often be found to lead each other. Not only may they, who at one time are too bold and venturesome, be at another too timid and distrustful; but even in the same service on which they were over eager of entering at first, they may, before the undertaking is completed, find their hearts misgive them. Nevertheless, if there be but godly sincerity, Christ will not suffer them, in time of trial, to make shipwreck of faith; but will first humble them, and then help them; so that they shall profit by their trials, and even by their mistakes, and find that the winds and the waves obey them.

It will not do however, to apply the encouragement couched under this reproof, to every person, nor to every

case ; for, as it had a relation to special circumstances at first, so we must apply it in a manner consistent with the analogy of faith.

Our Lord's saying to Peter, Wherefore didst *thou* doubt ? affords no ground for ministers to encourage their hearers indiscriminately not to doubt of their being in a state of salvation. Nor would it be safe for any individual to infer this, merely from reading or recollecting these words, or from having them impressed suddenly and strongly on his mind.

Peter himself was not blamed for doubting his own sincerity, but for doubting his Lord's fidelity and sufficiency ; doubting whether he would or could keep him from sinking, after he had called him to him on the water. But to infer from the sound of these words, that any individual is undoubtedly in a state of salvation, is to draw from them an inferential proposition totally different from any thing contained in the words themselves, and to make to ourselves an entirely new revelation. The gospel alone, independent of all internal qualifications, is a sufficient warrant to *apply* to Christ for salvation ; the work of the Spirit, compared with the word, is to be the evidence that we *have* applied to him ; and our works must prove the sincerity of our faith, to others.

But none are authorized to expect an immediate revelation of their safety or of their duty. The former must be learned by the scripture characters of the saved, and the latter by scripture precepts. And as to the knowledge of future events in this life, it is neither to be expected, nor desired ; but we must leave them to the Divine disposal, and think it enough that he has assured us, that, "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Many who hear the gospel, *ought* to doubt, at present, whether they are interested in its benefits ; yea, some, if they did but believe God, would be assured they are not so. Nor can Christians themselves expect to keep up a confidence of their safety, without keeping close to God ; nor would it be of any service to a backslider to be assured of his safety,

while his heart is wandering after idols ; but very much the contrary.

Dr. Owen, on Spiritual Mindedness, observes, that, "Under an habitual declension, or decay of grace in the spirituality of our affections, no man *can* keep or maintain a gracious sense of the love of God, or of peace with him." And in his Meditations on the Glory of Christ, he remarks, "Some would fain have evangelical joy, peace, and assurance, to countenance them in their evil frames and careless walking ; and some have attempted to reconcile these things to the ruin of their souls ; but it will not be. Without the diligent exercise of the grace of obedience, we cannot enjoy the grace of consolation."

Having so largely premised these things, I would endeavor to answer one inquiry founded on the text :—In what cases is doubting to be blamed, and confidence to be encouraged ?

The general answer is, We are always more or less to blame for doubting what God has really revealed in his word. If God had revealed in his word, that such an one should be saved, it would be a sin to doubt the safety of such a person : but there is no such proposition contained there ; nor does the Spirit reveal to any one, truths not before contained in the word.

FIRST : If ever we doubt of the veracity of the divine word in general, we are doubtless to blame for that. Because the word of God is confirmed by ample evidence, and contains in itself such evidences as may well convince any honest and impartial mind.

Our doubts of the divine original of the sacred scriptures arise chiefly from the want of a godlike taste ; a dutiful, dependent spirit ; an humble, contrite, penitent, docile, grateful, ingenuous frame of mind. Yet some have little room to boast that they never doubted ; I mean such as never examine the Bible, though they may profess to admit its authenticity.

And true believers may have their faith assaulted ; but a little reflection on their own experience will bring home the correction in the text, "Wherefore didst thou doubt ?" Has not this word laid open thine heart ; and

told all thou ever didst? Has it not displayed the glorious character of God; given a perfect rule of duty; discovered thy danger and remedy; produced peace and purity? Has it ever misled thee; ever deceived thee? Where else will you look for the words of eternal life?

SECONDLY: We are blameworthy if ever we doubt of Christ's ability to save at last, all who come unto God by him.

Is he not the true Messiah? How many prophecies have been fulfilled! What sense can we otherwise make of the Jewish dispensation? Is he not Immanuel? Has he not been obedient unto death? Did not God the Father seal his mission? Has not the Spirit confirmed it? Is he not the end of the law? Was not his obedience glorious? Were not his sufferings vicarious; and quite sufficient to answer the end of the original threatening?

THIRDLY: If ever we question Christ's willingness to receive the coming sinner, we are criminal. He has given us as much proof of his willingness as of his power. The assurance that he is "able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by him," includes this. He can find in his heart to save the unworthiest and guiltiest. It was designed that all saved by him should be to the praise of the glory of his grace. His death was needful for none but them that deserved to die. He has declared, "Him that cometh to me, I will in nowise cast out:" and no instance can be found of his falsifying his word.

FOURTHLY: If we doubt of the sufficiency of Christ's grace to help all those who would live on his fulness, and conform to his will. Though without him you can do nothing, cannot you do all things through Christ strengthening you? Had Paul any more strength of his own, or had he less to do, or to undergo, than you? Is not Christ's strength made perfect in your weakness? Is not your extremity his opportunity? Can any thing be too hard for the Lord? Does he send you on a warfare at your own charges?

FIFTHLY: If we doubt the attention of Christ's providence to our temporal necessities, though we have been helped to trust him with our souls. Has he died to save your

souls, and will he starve your bodies? "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?" Does not he clothe the lilies and the tulips, and feed the ravens and the lions? Is not godliness profitable for all things, having the promise of "the life that now is, and of that which is to come."? "Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." "Trust in the Lord and do good, and verily thou shalt be fed."

SIXTHLY: If we doubt of Christ's faithfulness to give heaven at last, to all who are desirous of it and willing to receive it as a free gift. "Fear not, little flock: it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." He has formed you for it, and given you the earnest. 2 Cor. v. 5. Light, holiness, and joy, are pledges of their perfection.

Let us carefully examine ourselves, if we have embraced the gospel. If you know your own mind, God has told you his. Be thankful for what the sacred scriptures have revealed. You need not want the Bible to say more than it does.

LVIII.

THE NECESSITY OF SELF-DENIAL.

MATT. xvi. 24.

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

THESE words are very positive. What shall we do with them? Can we all make them so accord with our practice, as to prove we are true Christians? If that be difficult, shall we attempt to lower their meaning, and bring them down to our level? Or shall we endeavor to exempt ourselves from this text, and confine it to the apostles or primitive Christians? Can this be done? Would it not be better to try to ascertain the full import of the words, and labor to conform to them? Let us,

FIRST, Reflect whose words they are.

He that spake them was infallibly wise, and could not be

mistaken. He knew what his followers must expect, and was too honest to deceive them. He is infinitely kind, and did not utter this declaration from an unfeeling neglect of our true interests. He did not prescribe that to others, to which he refused to submit himself. It fitted his lips. He went before in the same track; he pleased not himself; he did not aim at self-indulgence. While he prescribed self-denial, he did not seek a private self-interest; nor aim at his own glory, ease, or enjoyment. When he took upon him the form of a servant, all he regarded was obedience; and he accomplished the end for which he was sent. John v. 30. He could not indeed deny the truth; (John viii. 55.) but he was willing to waive insisting upon it; to act as a delegate; and to be treated by men as very different from what he really was—and this, not only for his Father's sake, but for ours. Yes, he so identified his interest with his people's, that he was even willing to be treated by his dear Father as they had deserved to be treated, that they might consequently be treated as he deserved to be treated, even as God's dear children. This was the highest act of self-denial that ever was! Now then, we should be willing to be identified with him; and if men are such bad judges of excellence as to despise him, we should be willing to be despised too, for his sake. Let them that condemn him, also condemn us; if he that approved him, will but approve us. If he who was so worthy, was willing to be set at nought; why should we, who are so unworthy, want to be made much of? These are the words of Him who will be our Judge, who will decide on our character, and determine our final doom; and who will not let any one lose by him at last.

SECONDLY: Examine their import, extent, and meaning.

If any one is willing to come after me.—Whoever is willing may, if he will take the right road. Christ is gone before his people. He is entered into rest, entered into glory; but he passed through toil, ignominy, and suffering: and if any one would come after him, and reach the mansions of which he has taken possession, he must go the road Jesus has marked out, and which he himself went. So the Apostle warned the first Christians, that through much tribulation,

they must enter the kingdom. We must, more or less, be baptized with his baptism.

Let him deny himself.—Without self-denial, Christ cannot be cordially received in his various offices, as prophet, priest, and king. If any one would be Christ's disciple, he must deny his own wisdom, that he may learn of him. He must be willing to be instructed, submit to his decisions, and embrace the truth as it is in Jesus. In him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge: the only-begotten of the Father, he hath revealed him. If any one would have the benefit of Christ's mediation, let him deny self-righteousness, confess his guilt and demerit, and own himself worthy of death. If self would make any claim contrary to the honor of Christ, deny it. If any one would inherit Christ's kingdom, let him deny his own will, be subject to his authority, and conform to his will. Let him deny his own sufficiency, and rely entirely on the grace and strength of Christ. The self-denial here required is a very extensive duty. Let him abstain from all God has forbidden. If sin is become as it were a second self, how proper is it that we should deny it, mortify it, and crucify it! "The grace of God, (says the Apostle,) teaches us to deny ungodliness, and worldly lusts;" that is, to guard against every thing that implies an undervaluing of God, or an over-valuing of the world. If the essence of sin consists in selfishness, or the pursuing a private interest, not subordinate to the glory of God, nor connected with the good of others; surely self-denial must be essential to the character of a Christian. If self requests any thing God has forbidden, he must deny it peremptorily. Let him comply with all God has commanded, notwithstanding all the opposition he may encounter. Follow the Lord fully; follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth; through evil report or good; by honor or by dishonor. I am not my own; I am under law to God; and must do as he commands, without deviating from his will. Submit then, to all he has appointed. Be still, and know that he is God. Suffer for God, as well as act for God. Christ did so, and shall not we? Let God choose for us; we have no right to choose for ourselves; nor are we competent so to do. "Who

can tell what is good for a man of all that is before him, in this vain life?" Watch over all the appetites of the body, lest they assume an inordinate influence over the mind, and so lead you to disobey or dishonor God. Guard, not only against all intemperance, impurity, or dishonesty; but against all undue attachment to the most lawful worldly enjoyments. Covetousness is idolatry; and earthly things may be idolized by those who are not penurious or extortionate. Be at least equally aware of the lusts of the mind, pride, self-righteousness, and self-sufficiency, which would derogate from the honor of God our Saviour. Be prepared to part with any thing in the world, or with all the world, if God should call you to it.

Let him take up his cross.—That is, Let him be prepared to endure ignominy, torture, and death for my sake, if he should be called to it, as he probably may. Nor will he, who is prepared to suffer all extremities rather than deny Christ formally, be reluctant to undergo slighter evils rather than deny him practically. We are elsewhere taught to crucify the flesh; that is, to treat self, or sinful selfishness in every form, including self-righteousness as well as self-indulgence, even every thing opposed to God's honor and glory,—as a malefactor, that deserves death; an ignominious death, for it is a thief and a robber. Let it die unpitied, be its death ever so painful.

And let him follow me.—That is, Let him eye my example continually; remembering how I sought God's glory, and man's good; and endured the contradiction of sinners against myself for so doing. I came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister. I showed that true greatness consists, not in making many serviceable to one, but in one's effectually serving many. I accounted it more blessed to give than to receive. So do ye. Let all constantly look to me for succor and aid. My grace is sufficient; my strength is made perfect in weakness. The Christian can say, with Paul, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Let him expect living with me to be a sufficient recompense for all toils and troubles, losses and sufferings. Ver. 25—27.

Well now, can we say without insincerity—This is our aim, our desire, our study, our endeavor? We fain would come after Christ; deny ourselves; take up our cross, and follow him? We are not afraid to tread in his steps; we are only afraid of following too far off; afraid of denying him in any respect; afraid of seeming to be ashamed of him; of giving any other object the preference to him? Can we say—We wish all that he dislikes in us may be crucified, and that our whole souls may be drawn after him? We wish to feel a stronger degree of this heavenly attraction, that we may run in the way of his commandments, with enlargedness of heart? We cannot be satisfied till we are with him to behold his glory, and are completely conformed to his likeness? They who now deny themselves for God, shall enjoy themselves for ever; or rather, shall enjoy him for ever. They shall enter into the joy of their Lord, and participate of the blessedness of the infinitely happy God.

LIX.

THE CHILDLIKE SPIRIT OF A CHRISTIAN.

MATT. xviii. 3.

Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

THE occasion of these words being spoken by our blessed Lord, was a dispute which arose among his disciples, who should be greatest in the kingdom of heaven. But though he certainly meant to rebuke them for their ambitious temper; yet, he did not design to suggest, that they were absolutely graceless or unconverted when the reproof was given. See Chap. xvi. 17. of this same Gospel. “Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which in heaven.” Nor did our Lord mean to ascribe real moral excellence to little children, any more than to doves or sheep; nor yet to propose them as examples in every thing: but he intended to inculcate the universal necessity of the new birth, and at the same time to illustrate some of its genuine effects, respecting our temper towards God and man. Though

these dispositions are not found perfect in any new-born soul, any more than in the apostles ; yet they who are truly the subjects of divine grace do correspond to this description, in proportion as grace prevails. There is not a man but needs conversion, even such a conversion as shall make him a new creature. Whoever will see heaven, must needs be born again. All have been perverted, and must be converted. All have been turned aside into a wrong way, and must be brought back to the right way, to God's way. All are proud, and must be deeply humbled ; yea, they need this more and more.

The Doctrine is this :—*The temper of a little child may afford an emblem of the disposition of a gracious soul.*

FIRST : A man must be converted from a spirit of *self-righteousness*, and all notions of human merit. He must receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child, i. e. as a *free gift*, and not earned by him. Mark x. 15. “ Verily, I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall not enter therein.” Little children have no idea of having obtained large estates by their own labor : they come to them only by gift, after having been originally procured by the labor of some other person. So are Christians confessedly indebted to Christ alone. Nor do little children pride themselves in their estates, when given or left to them ; as though they had deserved them, and might despise others.

SECONDLY : A man must be converted from *self-sufficiency* ; and brought into a state of continual dependance on God, for his spiritual sustenance, and for the daily supplies of his manifold necessities. As a child depends on his father, not only for a future inheritance, but also for the supply of his present wants ; so do believers feel and own their dependance, both on the providence and grace of God.

THIRDLY : A man must be converted also from *self-confidence* ; and resemble a little child in looking to a superior power for protection. As a little child is afraid of the appearance of danger, and dares not encounter enemies in his own strength, but at the first alarm runs to his father for defence ; so it is with the true convert : he is afraid

especially of moral evil, and dares not trust to his own strength or wisdom to keep him from temptation.

FOURTHLY : A man must be converted from *self-will*, and be made to resemble a little child in docility, or readiness to be taught. Little children cannot pretend to know much ; they readily yield to the judgment of others. So true Christians, though they call no one Master on earth, yet are not disposed to make a man an offender for a word, are willing to be instructed, and to examine all by the word of God ; and readily yield to the authority of Christ. Children are not prejudiced, stiff, and self-willed : they are used to stand in awe of superiors, are easily melted into grief at a father's displeasure, fearing his frown more than a hardened slave would fear his blows. So it is with the Christian, especially with the most eminent in grace.

FIFTHLY : A man must be converted from *guile, hypocrisy*, and *by-end* in religion ; and become as a little child in ingenuous simplicity, not artfully feigning one thing and meaning another. Little children are comparatively artless ; you may easily see their real disposition ; they cannot hide their views, and carry on long intrigues. So it should be with the Christian.

SIXTHLY : A man must be converted from a spirit of *selfishness, malice*, and *revenge*. "In malice be ye children." 1 Cor. xiv. 20. Little children are gentle, sympathetic, affectionate, and of a forgiving spirit ; their quarrels are soon over ; they do not harbor long resentments, nor bear malice towards those that have offended them. So will it be the case with Christians, especially eminent Christians. We are not indeed bound to think alike of all, nor to delight in all, nor to confide in all. But we are strongly bound to love all. The spirit of a Christian is benevolence to all mankind, and special delight in all the family of God. Nothing is more opposite to the temper of Christ than a revengeful, malignant disposition. We who need so much forgiveness, whose whole dependance is on sovereign mercy, who are so indebted to divine compassion and pardoning grace, are bound to be merciful and forgiving. How can our profession be true, if it do not make us ready to forgive others ?

What a sad spirit is often shown by unconverted men ! How proud and self-sufficient are they ! self-willed, full of guile, subtlety, selfishness, and malice ! What a contrast should Christians manifest to these vile tempers ! Old things must be done away, and all things become new. How suspicious is our conversion if it be not thus discovered !

What room have some professors to fear that they were never converted ! Well regulated worldly principles may indeed disguise such tempers ; but grace alone will truly mortify them, and make us desirous of their utter suppression. Be, however, stricter on this head with yourselves, than with others. As to others, remember, that in order to judge of what the grace of God has done for a man, you should try to estimate what he would have been without it. As to yourself, treat your tempers at least as you would your bodily diseases ; watch against that of which you are most in danger.

How excellent a thing is true conversion ! Let us be concerned to evidence that we have really experienced it. May we aspire after more of a Christian temper. We certainly need it. As we grow in grace, we shall become more like little children all our days. We have little religion, if we have but little humility.

LX.

SELF-SUSPICION ENFORCED.

MATT. xxvi. 22.

And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I ?

SUPERFICIAL observers, when they read the account of Judas Iscariot, may be ready to wonder at our Lord's putting him among the number of his apostles ; when he, as the Searcher of hearts, must certainly have known the original defect of his character, and foreseen the act of treachery which he would perpetrate at last.

But not only was this circumstance previously foretold, and almost necessary to our Saviour's suffering that death

which the determinate counsel of God had ordained ; but it also served strongly to mark the innocence of the character of Jesus, when one, who had had every opportunity to observe him in the closest manner, and whose interest it was to asperse it, could impeach him of no crime whatever ; though disappointed covetousness led him to abandon his cause, and to betray him into the hands of sinners.

Judas being numbered for a time with the apostles, and yet at last proving himself a devil, is also a useful specimen of the deceitfulness of sin, and may justly warn us to beware of the treachery of our own hearts.

Some, indeed, when they think of the atrocity of his crime, may suppose that there is little danger of their imitating it. And true it is, that it never was in all respects equalled ; nor can any of us have an opportunity of acting precisely the same part. If, however, we suppose the only reason is, the superior native goodness of our hearts, we only evidence our ignorance and conceit, and show that we have greater confidence in ourselves, than all the rest of the apostles : for when our Lord forewarned them, they all began to say, “ Lord, is it I ? ” We therefore may learn from this passage, the following instructive lessons :

FIRST: It is possible, that among the nominal disciples of Christ, who have enjoyed the best means of instruction, some may be found, who will eventually prove traitors to him, and children of the devil.

If there was one among the apostles, surely there may be some among ordinary disciples : if one among twelve, there may be more among one, or two, or three hundred church members : if one among them that attended Christ’s personal ministry, who was like a refiner’s fire ; it may be so among those who attend inferior ministers, who are not near so searching in their preaching. If one among those who followed our Lord in the day of his humiliation, did not enter into the spirituality of his kingdom, and thus became offended when he found there was so little to be got by him ; it may more likely be the case, now a general profession of Christianity is so common, and a more particular one is attended with so little risque. Judas saw Christ in the flesh. Judas

was doubtless baptized; though it is questionable if he ate the Lord's supper. Paul, however, plainly intimates that some may, who never discern the Lord's body. Judas seems to have wrought miracles, cast out devils, preached the gospel, yet never truly believed the gospel, nor was Satan cast out of him.

Brethren! Jesus Christ will never disown those who truly love him. He will not renounce us by caprice. He will not disown those who would not for all the world disown him. But on the other hand, we can no more deceive him, with false pretences, than Judas could by saying, Hail master, and kissing him. In vain have we been numbered with his disciples, if our hearts were never united to our Lord. If we love the world better than him; if we were never really divorced from sin; if some sin or other has had dominion over us, all through our profession, and we never were willing to have it mortified; if we took up with a profession for some by-end, and never had just views of the gospel, or a cordial approbation of it; if we never received Christ in all his offices; if we are willing to part with him, and now act as if we could do without him; if we do not much regret giving his enemies advantage against him;—if these things are so, are we not traitors to Christ; and though we have a place in his house below, yet will not Judas's own place be ours at last?

Brethren, I mean nothing but your benefit and my own, by these interrogatories. I wish not to give you any needless uneasiness: but Jesus Christ, who knew the sincerity of the eleven, thought it good to give them all a warning, though he knew it would make them exceedingly sorrowful.

SECONDLY: It will be natural and profitable, for this consideration to excite godly jealousy and self-examination, in those that are most sincere.

True Christians know so much of the worth of Christ, and have so exalted an idea of his character, that, comparing their attachment with the ground of it, it seems shamefully defective, and their warmest love too languid. They know more of the difficulties of religion, than those that never were earnest in attending to it, and therefore are more ready

to fear lest they should not surmount them. They have more knowledge of human depravity, especially of their own hearts, and hence are more suspicious of themselves, and more easily alarmed by divine warnings. Not but that they are in danger of a degree of self-confidence, which will be prejudicial to them, as it was to Peter : especially at their first entrance on religion, before experience has led them deeper into the knowledge of themselves.

THIRDLY : We ought to be exceedingly careful, lest, when we seem to comply with the duty of self-examination, we should use it in so superficial a manner, as to make it a means of farther deception. Ver. 25.

Let us, beloved, be serious, be frequent, be earnest in this duty ; and attend to it as in Christ's own presence. Think of the frequency of self-deception. There never was but one who sold Christ's body ; but many have sold his truth, have betrayed his cause, have been ashamed of him before men. Such would have sold him himself, had they been in Judas's place. If we have not done this openly, has it not been for want of a temptation ? An hour of sharper trial may be at hand. Danger detects some ; the smiles of the world detect others ; false gospels detect others. They are brought up under a strain of preaching, humbling and evangelical, and yet strict and practical, and do not dare to object to it, till they hear a pretended gospel, more flattering either to human pride, or to sinful indulgence ; and then they sell the truth, for some gratification of pride, indolence, or covetousness. Thus many are detected in this life. But if our love to Christ be insincere, though it should not be detected here, yet it will be at last, when time shall be no longer. The eyes of Christ are as a flame of fire ; he needs not actual experiment to find us out ; he sees to the bottom of our hearts. Let us beg him to search and try us ; to make known to us what we are. By and by, if our lamps are gone out, there will be no oil to be bought. Now, even those who have been hypocritical in their profession, are encouraged to come and buy, without money and without price. Let us all examine ourselves ; especially those who have made a public profession. But let none fancy themselves uncon-

cerned. If they need to be deeply affected, who have made the strictest profession; should not those be alarmed, who never so much as professed to seek the Lord?

LXI.

WATCHFULNESS AND PRAYER.

MATT. xxvi. 41.

Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

THIS charge was given by our blessed Lord; and though addressed to some particular persons, and on a particular occasion, yet I cannot think it ought to be confined to them. It is not only recorded for general instruction, but I think we should be justified in making as particular an application of it, as if it had been immediately given to ourselves. For our Lord gave a very similar charge upon other occasions. xxiv. 42. Mark xiii. 33. 35. And again, in the last verse, he says, What I say unto you, I say unto ALL—Watch. If then it be inquired,

FIRST, Who stand in need of this charge? I answer,

All of us really need it. And surely all who are taught of God, and know their hearts, and duly consider their situation, must feel and own their need of it. What! was it needful for Peter, James, and John, and for all the apostles! and is it not needful for us? Yes, even for the oldest, the most established, the most eminent saints; who are within a few day's journey of heaven. No knowledge, no love, no experience, no attainments, no high enjoyments, render it unnecessary. And is it not needful for you, young professors, who have just set out in the ways of God; just girded on your armor, and seem to be under the impressions of your first love? Oh, it is needful for all. Without attending to it, you may dishonor your profession as soon as you have made it; or, you may disgrace the cause you have adorned for years.

SECONDLY: When is it necessary?

The time when it was given was remarkable. But it was

needful not only then, or in similar circumstances. Just after they had eaten the Lord's supper; just before their Lord's apprehension and last sufferings; just during his agony, they needed a repeated charge. It is needful

for us at all times. In retirement, and in the world; or we shall sink into sinful drowsiness; or be surprized by intruding enemies.

In the best of company: even the bodily presence of Christ did not render it unnecessary. In the company of the ungodly. Ps. xxxix. 1.

In time of outward ease and apparent security, when it seems as if no temptation was near us. In times of peculiar trial and irritation.

THIRDLY: Why is this charge so needful?

Because in this world we are continually surrounded with snares and dangers.

The trials of our faith are numerous and exceedingly diversified. We read of manifold temptations.

Sometimes we are tempted to sloth and inactivity; to intermit our exertions, and neglect our duty; to rest in a mere form, not caring for communion with God, enjoying his presence, or promoting his glory.

Sometimes we are tempted to more direct inconsistencies, and express transgressions of the divine precepts, so as to give occasion, by our misconduct, to his enemies to blaspheme.

The things of time often make an undue impression on our minds, engross our affections, interrupt our spiritual enjoyments, or fret and discompose us.

We have an invisible adversary, who goes about, seeking whom he may devour; crafty as a serpent, dreadful as a roaring lion, never at rest.

Worldly men either directly oppose us, or else try to ensnare us, and draw us into their spirit.

The commission of one sin often leads to other sins. So David gave way to indolence, wantonness, adultery; the intoxication of Uriah, and his murder! Oh, what a train of evils!

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit, willing to attend to duty; but we have flesh as well as spirit, and the flesh is weak, easily overcome. On the other hand, the spirit is willing to deny sin; but the flesh is importunate and violent, and a

little gratification only makes it more so. *Obsta principiis.*
Abstain from all appearance of evil.

FOURTHLY: What is included in this charge?

Two parts. Watch and pray. What God has joined together, let no one put asunder. Each of these duties must be combined with the other.

Watching will not suffice without prayer. This would indicate and increase self-confidence; and soon would pride be found to go before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Our spiritual enemies would laugh at all our sagacity and resolution, if unattended with humility and dependance on grace.

Nor will prayer do without watchfulness. That would argue great inconsistency and insincerity. God has made both our duty; neither must be neglected. Neither our praying, nor his promises, supercede the necessity of watchfulness.

We need to watch over both body and mind. Lest bodily senses and natural appetites, become inlets of temptation. As Job made a covenant with his eyes, lest a wanton glance should draw him into sin; so we should watch, lest the appetites given to insure self-preservation, should bring the soul into subjection, and injure health itself. We should watch, lest mental passions become irregular, and thus break through the restraints which should be imposed upon them, by supreme love to God and disinterested benevolence to man. We should watch against every thing opposed to the love of God and our neighbour. We should watch, lest our affections should receive a wrong bias: or lest those, which it is our duty to cherish, should become disproportioned and inordinate. *Perimus in licitis.* We should watch, lest there be a decline in our best graces, and most spiritual affections; lest our zeal grow cold, and our activity in the cause of God abate. If you would not decline, beware of becoming stationary; be concerned to get forward, to grow in grace. Watch, lest one duty clash with or thrust out another. Or lest we should overlook some lamentable deficiency. Or lest our graces should be mingled with some counterfeit, or corrupt mixture. As

zeal with bitterness, boldness with self-confidence, tenderness with connivance at sin, strictness with morose severity.

Lest, upon being made sensible of one extreme, we should run into another. The way to life is a narrow way, both as to doctrine and duty.

Oh ! there is need of constant circumspection, in prosperity and in adversity. If riches increase, set not your heart on them. Under trials, beware of murmuring, desponding, or using unlawful means of relief. Watch against sins to which you have been formerly addicted ; and be not secure respecting those to which you were never yet tempted.

Pray for divine illumination, and for divine assistance. That you may understand the rule, and faithfully apply it. That conscience may be well informed, very tender and faithful. That God would so regulate outward events, as not to suffer you to be led into temptation, or else to make a way of escape. That he would grant inward support, fortify against temptation, fit for every duty, renew your strength, and enable you to persevere to the end. His grace is all-sufficient.

Come boldly to the throne of grace for seasonable assistance. Pray for all might in the inner man, that you may both do and suffer his will.

FIFTHLY : Wherefore should we regard this charge ?

For our own sakes ; as without it we may soon be involved in great distress and danger. They who habitually disregard it, can have no certainty of their sincerity or safety. And if they could, would any wise man disregard the breaking of his bones, if his life were insured for a given period ? You will, at least, soon lose the joys of God's salvation ; and are they of small value ? You may fall farther and farther ; God only knows where you will stop ; and if it be short of endless ruin, do you care for nothing but that ?

For the sake of others ; lest you grieve your brethren, and stumble enquirers ; lest you confirm the prejudices of the irreligious, and give an handle to enemies to reproach. Be concerned rather to constrain them to say, " We will go with you, for we see that God is with you of a truth."

Watch especially for Christ's sake ; from a regard to his

authority, who has given you this charge, and evidently treats it as your duty. From a concern for his *honor*,

which is closely connected with your attention to this duty. How often has he been wounded in the house of his friends!

Will you also crucify him afresh? From a regard to your *enjoyment* of him, which cannot be expected but in the way of obedience. From a dread of his *chastisements*.

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." From a regard to his *approbation*.

"Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth clean his garments." Rev. xvi. 15. Matt. xxiv. 46. Let his wonderful love

constrain you to regard this charge. Show that nothing is so dear to you as the honor of your blessed Lord?

How utterly inconsistent is this language with the pernicious notion, that believers are in no sense under the law! Where there is no law, there is no transgression. But if there be no duty and no sin; or if nothing more is duty, than that to which you are effectually inclined; what call can there be to watch and pray?

LXII.

SATAN THE ENEMY OF SOULS.

LUKE ix. 42.

And as he was yet coming, the devil threw him down, and tare him: and Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father.

WE shall not now enter into the controversy which has been raised respecting the demoniacs, so often mentioned in the Gospels. To me, it appears evident, that they were not mere lunatics, from whom they were expressly distinguished; (Matt. iv. 24.) though, in some instances, the two evils might be combined in the same person, as they appear to have been in the case now under consideration. Matt. xvii. 15.

But great violence must be done to scripture, if we exclude all agency of evil spirits in the infliction of those tortures on the body, which were so frequent in the days of our Lord; and which seem to have been permitted, to give him the

opportunity of displaying more abundantly his power and grace, in delivering so many of these miserable sufferers ; and thus showing himself to be Him that was manifested to destroy the works of the devil.

And as most of his miracles of healing, performed on the bodies of men, served to illustrate the still more important operations of his grace on the soul ; so these, in particular, were well adapted to that end.

On which account, I shall not scruple employing the words of our text, to remind us of several important truths ; which may warn us against Satan's devices, and direct and encourage us in our application to Christ for relief.

FIRST : Satan is a cruel enemy to mankind, who, by all the methods he is permitted to use, labors to oppose their welfare.

He would readily injure both body and soul. Angels are said to excel in strength ; and fallen angels have still greater natural powers, though employed for bad purposes. God can limit the powers of darkness, or none knows the mischief they might do us, by various ways. Satan shows his malevolent disposition towards old and young. He is peculiarly gratified, when he can ensnare betimes. He is the real enemy, of both sinners and saints. He has no affection to his own servants, and no respect for the children of God. He seeks our ruin in a variety of ways : by possessing the soul, enslaving it to the tyranny of sin, or defiling it with moral impurity. Into what filthy practices does he draw some ! With what vile affections does he pollute others ! Sometimes he stupifies the soul ; sometimes distracts it ; throws it into violent and opposite extremes ; disturbs the natural order of the faculties ; draws the soul into voluntary banishment from God ; reducing it to a state of wretchedness and misery ; rendering it obnoxious to the divine displeasure ; and perpetually increasing the load of guilt. His worst cruelties on human bodies, at the period when he had greatest liberty to afflict them, give us but a faint emblem of his greater cruelties to souls. However, in all his mischievous attempts, he is constantly under divine control. 1 Pet. v. 8.

SECONDLY: The Lord Jesus is the great Saviour of them that are oppressed by the devil; and it is their duty and interest to apply to him.

His very name indicates his relation to them, in opposition to him. Satan is the destroyer; but Jesus is the Saviour. Satan destroys souls, by tempting to sin: Jesus saves souls, by turning from sin—at once granting repentance and remission of sins. Jesus has given the strongest evidence of his power and willingness to succor them that are oppressed by the devil. Acts x. 38. For this purpose he was manifested in the flesh, and that in consequence of his own free and unmerited love. Heb. ii. 14. He has done, suffered, and said enough to prove this. Never did he reject any who applied to him. His greatest declarative glory is closely connected with the salvation of miserable sinners. He cannot triumph over Satan, but by rescuing them.

THIRDLY: Satan will naturally be enraged when his captives apply to Christ; and give them all the molestation he can, as they are coming to him.

He dislikes their having any thoughts of the kind. He would keep them from hearing the truth; or, at least, from paying any serious regard to it; or would lead them to abuse it, and to hold it in unrighteousness. If he cannot pervert to presumption, then he will drive to despair. You ought to despair of safety out of Christ; to doubt of your interest in him, while unwilling to receive him, or to unite with him in the design of his redemption. It is no sin to doubt your own willingness, if you are unwilling; though it is a sin to be unwilling. But it is a sin to doubt either his ability, or his grace. All who came to him in the days of his flesh, came under a persuasion of his sufficiency and benevolence: but very few of them had any previous knowledge of his good will to them in particular. Satan often perplexes souls, by tempting them to look for some other warrant, besides the free invitations of the gospel; to consider as requisite a knowledge of divine decrees, new revelations, or internal qualifications. Sometimes he injects atheistical, infidel, blasphemous thoughts; suspicions of the truth of religion. He stirs up native depravity, vile lusts, violent

passions, pride, envy towards others. He labors to excite hard thoughts of God, and especially tempts to murmur against his sovereignty.

He uses various stumbling-blocks; misrepresenting truth; making a handle of the miscarriages of hypocrites and formalists, and of the imperfections of the godly.

He excites fears of sin being too great; suggests peculiar aggravations; or alarms with a dread of having committed the unpardonable sin.

Do you disapprove of God's method of salvation? Are you determined not to repent or submit? Are you unwilling to be indebted to Christ for pardon? Can you bear the thought of separation from him and his people? If your whole soul cries, *No!* all shall be well. Satan tempts you to conceal your case, and then to think it singular. 'Never was any one like you.' He often stirs up carnal friends to oppose and persecute.

Perhaps he may labor to excite wrong tempers in the good people with whom you may be connected. Eli fomed a wrong opinion of Hannah; and so did Job's friends of his case.

Or, Satan may tempt the soul to misconduct; and to neglect one duty, under the idea of attending to another; and then to be much offended with those that may disapprove of this impropriety.

God suffers Satan thus to harass the returning sinner, to make him the more weary of his bondage; to lead him into farther acquaintance with his own heart; and to render divine grace more illustrious in the end.

FOURTHLY : Notwithstanding the violence of Satan's opposition, and the temporary increase of distress, every case shall issue well which is really committed to Christ.

We dare not answer for the good issue of every case of such as can talk about religion, as seem for a time very devout, or greatly alarmed, and much concerned about escaping hell; nor of every one who has evangelical notions, various religious affections, or high confidence of safety.

But all who come to Christ, desire him sincerely, earnestly, wholly; are willing to part with all for him; and give themselves up wholly to him; and heartily acquiesce in the way of salvation by him; we dare answer for their reception. They have three great encouragements: The goodness of God

is self-moved and sovereign. Christ has rendered salvation consistent with the divine glory. He has declared his readiness to receive all who come.

Oh ! that sinners were sensible of the misery of subjection to that Spirit who worketh in all the children of disobedience. The tempter, who now labors to benumb conscience, will ere long prove its tormentor. He has one quality which no other master has, how cruel soever ; namely, to torment those most, and give them the worst wages, who have done him the most faithful and continued services.

O be persuaded to flee instantly to Jesus. Fear not but he will receive and heal you.

Let Christians labor to counterwork Satan, by encouraging returning souls.

LXIII.

HUMILITY ESSENTIAL TO TRUE GREATNESS.

LUKE ix. 48.

He that is least among you all, the same shall be great.

THE integrity of the sacred writers is remarkably conspicuous in their relating so freely and unreservedly, the defects and imperfections of themselves and of their brethren. This ingenuous disposition is peculiarly evident in the Evangelists ; and appears particularly, in the relation of the Jewish prejudices, which infected the apostles, while our Lord was yet with them ; and which led them so fondly to indulge the idea of his setting up a temporal kingdom, in which they were ready to contend who should enjoy the pre-eminence. Such reasonings, Luke informs us, were at this time agitated among them ; and he relates the wise and gentle method which our blessed Lord took to instruct and correct them. Ver. 46—48. He closes his admonition with the words of our text : “ He that is least among you all, the same shall be great.” A maxim which is doubtless as needful to be remembered by us as by the apostles ; for who will say that we are less addicted to pride, or have less cause for humility.

than they? And doubtless it will hold good in the present day, as well as in theirs. There seems, indeed, a sort of paradox or mystery in this declaration; but it will admit of a very easy and satisfactory solution; as will appear if we consider,

FIRST, The reasons why the most eminent saints have the most humbling views of themselves.

All *creatures* are indeed little, diminutive beings, less than nothing and vanity, when compared with the great and glorious God. Things also appear great or small in proportion to the nearness of the station from whence we discern them. All sinners who are divinely enlightened, have room to think little of themselves, as compared with their brethren, as having that opportunity of knowing their own defects and unworthiness which they cannot have of knowing the deficiency and faults of others. He who lives nearest to God, will see most of God's greatness and majesty, and will consequently have the deepest sense of his own littleness and meanness. He will see most of the divine purity, and his own pollution. He who examines most the extent of his obligations, and has the best acquaintance with the rule of duty, will see most clearly how far he falls short of compliance with it, and will think himself most culpable for his transgressions or defects. He who sees most of the evil of sin, will naturally entertain the most humbling thoughts of himself. He who watches his own heart most thoroughly, will detect most of its secret evils, and will consequently appear the least and the meanest in his own eyes. He that is most concerned to do his whole duty, will think the least of what he does towards it. He who best understands the doctrine of the cross, will be the most deeply humbled by its import; and, feeling most of his obligations to the Saviour, will be most ashamed that he complies with them no more fully. He that has most love to the brethren, will think most highly of them, and least of himself, for love covers a multitude of sins; and though not blind to the faults of others, yet he will not dwell on their aggravations, as he will wish to do on those of his own sins. He who is nearest to what he should be, forms the best idea of what he ought to be, and

will therefore be the most displeased with himself for not being more entirely devoted to God ; which he sees is what duty absolutely requires. He also will be most sensible to what cause it is owing that he is in any degree restored to the divine image, and that he now begins to be devoted to God. He will ascribe it wholly to the operation of the Holy Spirit, and give God the entire praise of all that is wrought in him, as well as of all that was done for him. He that is actually the nearest to heaven, must have the best idea of what heaven will be ; and so, comparing himself not so much with what he once was, as with what he hopes to be at last, he is humbled and abased on account of the vast difference.

SECONDLY : The tendency of such views to promote true greatness.

There is just room for others highly to esteem the eminently humble man, and there is room to hope that he will become greater still. He who is least in his own eyes, the same is evidently great ; for he has the greatest light ; he has the truest views of God and of himself. He that is least among you all, the same shall be great ; for he will have the most love to God. Divine glory and goodness will appear greatest to him, and the sight of such majesty and condescension will increase his love and gratitude. He that thinks himself least, will be the most importunate in prayer for more grace ; and will be the most willing to be dependant on Christ alone for righteousness and strength. He will draw near to God in Christ's name only, and be most solicitous to receive out of his fulness grace for grace, living by faith. He that is most humble, and who is least in his own eyes, will be most likely to get good by every thing ; if he sees others fall he will dread lest he should do so, and so take warning ; while he will imitate good examples, be willing to receive reproof, and be the soonest convinced of a fault. He that is least among you all, will be the most willing to be servant of all ; and thereby will be the most willing to do good to all, and that will be the way to be greatly useful. Instead of contending for pre-eminence, he will be glad to occupy any post in which he can be of service. Selfishness is the root

and essence of sin, and disinterested affection is the essence of virtue. He that is the least in his own eyes, will be the most averse to setting up a private interest of his own; and the most ready to deny himself for the good of others; and to unite with the great family of heaven and earth, in promoting the divine glory and the general good of the created system. True greatness consists in union to God and his whole obedient kingdom; and the more self is denied, the more entire is that union. The less we are in our own eyes, the more ready we shall be to give God all the glory, and the safer it will be for us to be employed in his work; as we shall not presume to rob him of the glory due unto his name, which he will not give to another.

Let us examine, therefore, the nature and degree of our religion by this plain and certain test—What is the tendency of our principles, discoveries, and experience? Do they tend to make us little in our own eyes, and teach us to prefer others as better than ourselves? or do we get more fond of pre-eminence, more stiff and self-willed, more impatient of reproof ourselves, and less tender in our manner of giving it? Do we think highly of our partial humility? or are we ashamed of our remaining pride? If we are less in our own eyes than we once were, yet we are still not brought down to our proper place; we need much more humbling; and if God means to make any great use of us, it is probable we shall experience greater humiliation; for he resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. May we, as long as we live, become more and more like little children: this will be a sure evidence of growth in grace, and a happy means of farther growth, as we shall then be more importunate for more grace. May our humility be genuine and unfeigned. There is a counterfeit humility, which is a very big and self-important thing; which loves to vaunt itself, and to make a show; but is highly displeased if it be not noticed and admired. He who thinks much of his own humility cannot be possessed of much. Let us remember that genuine humility consists, not in outward show, nor in an affected garb, much less in a boasted ignorance; but in a lowly disposition of heart, prompting us to deny ourselves for the sake of others.

LXIV.

THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

LUKE xi. 13.

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him!

THE Evangelist, in this chapter, gives an account of a conversation which our Lord had with his disciples, concerning prayer. Two principal things demand our notice:

FIRST: An instructive direction evidently implied, respecting what blessing we should pray for above all others, viz. The Holy Spirit.

Nothing is so excellent, needful, or advantageous. In the similar part of our Lord's sermon on the Mount, he had said "good things," indefinitely. Matt. vii. 11. Here he tells us what is good, the chief good. Not as though he would revoke the former permission, or restrict us more from desiring any thing truly good; but he would give us a fuller discovery of the chief good. The Holy Spirit is

equivalent to all good things. No other blessing can be safely enjoyed without him. Temporal good would

ensnare us without the Holy Spirit; it will draw off our hearts from God, deaden us to spiritual things, fill us with pride and vanity, or with anxiety and increasing care, unless our hearts and minds are kept by the influences of the Holy Spirit. We shall neither enjoy earthly good safely, use

it profitably, nor part from it when necessary, without the Holy Spirit. Spiritual blessings cannot be enjoyed by

us at all, without the grace of the Holy Spirit. Neither objective good, or good without us; nor subjective good, or good within us. Objective spiritual good cannot be

known, except by divine illumination. Eph. i. 17, 18.

The nature of God, worth of his favor, way of access; the nature of heavenly happiness. 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10. Nor can it

be lawfully claimed, till we partake of the Holy Spirit. He

is the earnest of future bliss. 2 Cor. v. 5. Nor could this

good be relished or enjoyed without him. A proud, un-

humbled heart cannot enjoy a *free* salvation. Nor can a

heart full of sin, a holy salvation. Nor a worldly heart, set on present things, long for a future salvation. And as to subjective, or inherent spiritual good, of this we are wholly destitute till renewed by the Holy Spirit; that is, we have no conformity of taste to God; no purity, humility, penitence, submission; no devotedness to God, no supreme love to him, no disinterested regard to the good of all around us, no affections set on things above, or true heavenly-mindedness. Yea, we have no desire after God, or holiness, or true happiness, till it is wrought by the Holy Spirit. Therefore the Holy Spirit is the chief blessing for which we need to pray. His grace is the sum of all spiritual blessings, which we need infinitely more than any other blessing whatever. Nor is there any other blessing for which we have such encouragement to pray. For the more excellent any blessing is, the more ready is God to bestow it in answer to prayer. The infinite goodness of the divine nature is the more gratified, the grand design of redemption is the more answered, and Jesus has the greater success in his undertaking and labor. Those desires which are expressed in prayer for the most excellent blessings, are the most excellent desires; and consequently are such as God most approves, and which he is most ready to grant. The desire of mere temporal riches, or other similar blessings, is no virtuous desire; but the desire of grace, and especially of great grace, is a desire most pleasing to God. 1 Kings iii. 10. This will appear further, if we consider,

SECONDLY, The condescending comparison by which our Lord intended to afford peculiar encouragement to his people to pray, especially for this most important blessing. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him!"

He appeals particularly to parents, or indeed to all; since they who at present had no children, might become parents; and might judge, by what they saw in others, what their feelings would be if they were so. God is in some sense the Father of us all; and they who ask for his Holy Spirit show a willingness to be his children in a special sense; for the

work of the Holy Spirit is to make us of a childlike disposition towards God.

You are limited in your abilities, but God is not. You cannot alter your children's disposition, but God can. He can change the very heart, can turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, and make ready a people prepared for the Lord. It is for this end that he bestows his Holy Spirit.

You will perform what is in your power for your children's good. If you could make them good and holy, I trust you would. If parents had this power, surely no request the child could make would be so acceptable as, Teach me to love thee. God can and will do this for them that ask him.

You indeed, have been evil and depraved in your own disposition. Some are entirely so; others are renewed in part.

Too often unconverted parents would have their children, like themselves, in a wrong spirit; proud, resentful, covetous, or impure. Yet you would give them that which is naturally good. Even when you lead them into moral evil, it is under a notion, though a false one, of its being good. How much more will God, who is infinitely holy himself, give his Holy Spirit to those who request him to make them like himself!

Earthly parents are often erroneous in their judgments; they will sometimes give their children that which is hurtful to the body, excessively indulging the appetite. And sometimes they more immediately injure the soul, by humoring the passions, and rendering them capricious, self-willed, and insolent.

However, you know that bread and necessary food are good; and you would not give your child a stone for a loaf, or a serpent for a fish, or a scorpion for an egg. Now God, who knows infallibly what is best, will deny that which would be hurtful; but he will not deny his Holy Spirit. You may indeed be deficient in kindness itself. Yet you would not deny necessities, nor give poison instead of food; only monsters would do that. But the love of the kindest parent, so far as it is regulated properly, is from God, and is but a feeble emblem of his own infinite goodness. How much more then, will your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit!

Indeed, sincerely and earnestly to ask the Holy Spirit, is a blessed evidence that

you are not wholly destitute of his influence already. Any thing else may be sought in vain, even though we should apply to God for it. But if this blessing be but sought sincerely, it shall never be denied you.

Oh then, that we may be excited to ask for this invaluable blessing! If you do not know that you have partaken of it already, it is highly necessary for you. And if you have received the Spirit, you will be importunate for a larger supply. To him that hath, shall be given. Seek it for yourselves, that your understandings may be enlightened, your minds renewed, your wills bowed to God, your affections spiritualized, and your consciences made tender; that repentance, faith, humility, joy, zeal, and universal holiness may be increased; that sin may be mortified, Christ endeared, and God glorified.

Request also for others, that the Spirit being poured out from on high, the wilderness may blossom and bud like the rose; that Christians may be edified, and sinners converted to the Lord.

LXV.

THE RICH WORLDLING.

LUKE xii. 16—21.

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

IN this beautiful and instructive parable of our blessed Lord, four principal things demand our serious attention: The condition of the person described—His moral character

and conduct—His awful catastrophe—And the improvement our Lord intended that we should make of this representation. Let us consider,

FIRST, The condition of the man. This, many of you, I conceive, would think happy and enviable, and most of you would like yours to resemble it.

He was a man of considerable opulence, already rich, and his riches were still increasing. Nor had he obtained them by rapine or extortion; but in a lawful, creditable way, by the blessing of providence on his industry. “His ground brought forth plentifully.” And now it seems he had as

much as he could wish to possess; which is seldom the case with men.

He engaged in no hazardous enterprizes, which might involve the risque of all again. He does not appear to have had any ambitious, mischievous designs on foot, to injure or to provoke his fellow-men.

Nor had he any apprehensions of trouble from enemies, or bad neighbours.

He appears to have been in good health, and probably in the prime of life. He had no sickness, nor infirmities of body, to forebode an approaching dissolution.

Moreover, He had nothing particular which lay with weight on his conscience, to keep him from enjoying what he had with satisfaction.

Such was his outward condition; and surely, thus far, all seems very well. Let us, therefore, proceed to consider,

SECONDLY, His moral character and conduct; and see if we can find any thing here to alter our opinion concerning him.

There have been rich men, who were openly profane; abominably proud; shamefully licentious; hard-hearted and uncharitable; miserably penurious and cruelly oppressive.

No wonder that persons of such descriptions should find, that riches cannot deliver, nor profit them in the day of wrath and righteous revelation of the justice of God.

We have no reason, however, to lay any of these things to this man's charge.

He was also a Jew, a professed worshipper of the true God, and might punctually conform to the Mosaic ritual, and read the writings of the Old Testament.

But his heart was altogether set upon

his temporal and sensual enjoyments. He could not say, with truth, "Whom have I in heaven but thee; and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." God and his own immortal soul were totally forgotten by him. He never realized the danger to which he was exposed by sin; nor inquired, What must I do to be saved from the wrath to come? He did not notice the hand of God, in the bestowment of the good things he possessed. He did not realize the uncertainty, and perishable nature of all temporal things. He did not consider how unsuitable and unsatisfying a portion earth is, for a soul! He did not, in the least, aim at the glory of God, in the use he made, or intended to make, of his riches. He did not seriously consider himself as an accountable creature, responsible to God. He forgot his own immortality, and had no proper thought of a future state. He considered not himself as having a natural capacity for the everlasting enjoyment of God, as the real chief good. He reflected not seriously on his being liable to an eternity of misery, for his neglect of God, and for disobedience to his revealed will. And now let us behold,

THIRDLY, The awful catastrophe which befel him.

While he was laying his plan of operation, and looking forward to future enjoyments, God himself pronounced him a fool, ἄφρον. God assured him that his soul would be required of him, ἀπαιτοῦσιν. "They will require," Who, but the powers of darkness? The requisition would be peremptory and immediate, ταύτῃ τῇ νυχτὶ, in this very night. This cutting interrogation was added, ἃ δὲ ἡτοίμασας τίνι ἔσται. But the things which thou hast been preparing, whose shall they be? But let us consider,

FOURTHLY, The improvement of the parable.

If this man was a fool, how many, to say the least, are like him; if not even worse! If he was a fool, for minding the world only, and hoping to enjoy it, when he had so much; what are they, who seek not after divine riches, though pressed with present poverty? He had something to forget his soul for: you have nothing; not even a shadow. If he was a fool, to think of enjoying

himself; what are they, who are ever planning to injure others? Much worse.

In fact, our Lord says, Every one is a fool, who layeth up treasure for himself, and is *not rich toward God*. Surely, you cannot be rich toward God, unless you have evidence that your debts are paid. These are too great to be paid by yourself, or by any one but Jesus, the Surety of the New Testament. You cannot be rich toward God, till you possess a title to eternal life: and this you can have only through the righteousness of God our Saviour. If then you would be rich toward God, you must seek an interest in the unsearchable riches of Christ. They only are rich toward God, who have a treasure of grace put into their hearts, are rich in faith, and all spiritual graces. If you would prove that you are rich toward God, let the word of Christ dwell richly in you, in all wisdom. If you would show that you are rich toward God, mind the Apostle's charge; 1 Tim. vi. 17, 18. to lay yourselves out for God's glory, to do good, to be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, &c. If you would show that you are rich toward God, set your affections on things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. This will mortify covetousness; moderate your affections to earthly things; make you readily submit to the paternal chastisement which is intended to remind you that this is not your rest; and induce you to be willing and ready to go and enjoy your estate, which is reserved for you in a better world. Then shall you have that, which will support you under the troubles of life; fortify against the terrors of death; or give you ground to expect, that sudden death shall be sudden glory.

LXVI.

THE JOY OF ANGELS OVER THE PENITENT.

LUKE xv. 10.

Likewise, I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth.

ONE sinner repenting, is here represented as exciting joy in the presence of the angels of God. Let us consider,

FIRST, The event that produces this joy. *The repentance of a sinner.*

What is a sinner? A transgressor of the divine law, by which God governs the intelligent creation, and unites rational creatures to himself and each other. A law of more consequence to the moral world, than the law of gravitation to the natural world. A sinner is an unworthy and a hateful character, destitute of holy love; has lost the image of God, forfeited his favor, deserved his wrath; is fit to be rooted up as a weed out of God's garden, and cast into everlasting burnings.

If there was but one sinner in the world, with what horror would men look upon him! One man disobedient, disaffected to God! one man in danger of eternal ruin! In this world, sinners are very common. All men are sinners. I hope it is not the case with the inhabitants of any other world.

A repenting sinner is an altered character, who is ashamed of his former conduct, takes blame to himself for his transgressions, and is disposed to return to his allegiance. But though sinners are so common, penitents are not common. All of you are sinners; I dare not vouch for it, that you are all repenting sinners; yet all sinners have reason to repent, for sin is very evil, very unprofitable, very injurious, very ruinous. God commandeth all men every where to repent. Except you repent you will all perish. You have reason to repent of every sin; for every sin deserves the wrath and curse of God, in this world and that which is come. Every sinner has robbed God of the glory due to his name, slighted his favor, practically denied his authority, defies his wrath, and is exposed to perdition.

A true penitent is ashamed of his conduct, he is grieved for what he has done wrong, and would undo it if he possibly could; for he now cordially justifies God, in his requirements, prohibitions, charges and threatenings. A true penitent repents of all his sins, even those in which he once took most pleasure. Repentance may begin with some one evil, but will soon extend to all, known or unknown to men, of omission as well as commission. He that is a true penitent will never make a merit of his repentance, nor imagine it can

make amends for his transgressions. He knows that his very penitence is defective in degree, and is grieved that his heart is not more broken for sin. A true penitent can have no hope of forgiveness, but from sovereign mercy. He knows God would be just, if he should execute on him all the rigor of his law. He therefore can have no objection that God should prescribe the way in which sin shall be forgiven. He would rejoice at any intimation of mercy. He wonders at God's forbearance: his goodness leads him to deeper repentance. He can have no objection to a Mediator, who should fully justify God, and condemn sin. It would afford him ineffable comfort and relief, to know how God can at once be just, and yet justify the ungodly. He that is a true penitent, will long to have his sins mortified and subdued, as well as forgiven. He will value purity as well as pardon, and long for sin to be destroyed root and branch. He does not wish for any one sin to be spared. He is willing to maintain a warfare with sin as long as he lives.

The strongest hope of pardon, being built solely on the atonement of Christ, which is the only sure foundation, will not lessen his repentance. It may remove his dread of punishment, but will increase his conviction that the penalty was justly due to his transgressions, and so will deepen his humiliation and self-abasement, and increase his caution.

A true penitent will long for heaven, on account of the entire freedom from sin, and the perfect holiness which he shall enjoy there.

Let us consider,

SECONDLY, The joy which this event occasions in the presence of the angels in heaven.

There is no sin in heaven. Sin entered that world once. Perhaps a third part of the angels were seduced from their allegiance; but they were instantly banished from that high and holy place; and the holy angels justified the divine severity, and never had one hard thought of God for not sparing them.

And when man was seduced from his obedience, the holy angels would have justified God in inflicting on him the sentence he had denounced: but when God deferred his anger, and refrained from cutting him off, they had no suspicion that he could be charged with partiality, or that he

would ever dishonor himself: but they were all attention to the wonderful process of mercy; and this was increased as the plan of redemption was unfolded.

There is more connexion between this little polluted world and the invisible world, than we generally realize. Obe-

dient creatures of the highest order, feel an interest in all the divine conduct toward their fellow-creatures, though of an inferior race. All holy beings are pleased with whatever is done by the King of the universe. If it pleases God

to interest himself in the welfare of any creature, however mean and unworthy, they will immediately become greatly interested in it too. Especially, they are deeply in-

terested in the salvation of that race of creatures, to which God has been pleased to connect himself most closely, by assuming their nature into union with the person of the Son of God. Thus their love to man was founded, not on

our relation to them, but on our relation to God. Though they gave up their own associates as soon as they revolted from God, yet as soon as God disclosed his sovereign design of saving men, they coincided with the purpose of mercy. Thus, by the work of redemption, which is the greatest of all God's works, they learn his manifold wisdom. They

see that God can glorify himself, in the pardon of penitent sinners; but they know that no individual can partake of salvation without being brought to repentance. No one can come to Christ without turning his back on sin, nor see the need and beauty of his salvation without seeing the evil of sin.

It is probable that no sinner is ever brought to repentance, without the angels soon being aware of it. Perhaps, even before the change takes place, they have a particular charge given them. And when it begins, they are not liable to be deceived, as even good men often are, by false appearances.

It is known to them to be a hard and difficult thing, to bring a sinner to repentance; and therefore they admire the divine power which can effect so great a change.

They are glad to see a sinner brought to repentance, because it is so *right* and *reasonable* that he should repent. They know what a *blessed* thing it is for a sinner to

be brought to repentance; and how *happy* it is for himself. They are glad of every addition made to the number of true saints on earth, and rejoice when Christ's subjects increase. The angels fully expect, that every true penitent will be kept, by the mighty power of God, through faith, unto salvation. Otherwise their joy would be premature. They expect, that every repenting sinner will become their associate for ever, in the kingdom of heaven; and will at last, be as holy and as happy as they.

I do not think the angels keep their pleasure to themselves: it is highly probable, that the spirits of the just made perfect, share their joy. Your departed relations, who died in the Lord. It is certain, that God himself rejoices over sinners, that are truly brought to repentance. Ver. 20. This was the joy set before the Redeemer, on account of which he endured the cross, despising the shame. He is exalted to give repentance, as well as remission of sins.

Now then, has there ever been any such joy excited among the angels, on your account? Have you repented and returned to God? Do you live a life of penitence and faith? Or do you mean to gratify fallen angels, who will be glad to taunt you—'Art thou also become like unto us! We were sometimes afraid we should lose him, when he sat under the sound of the gospel; but we have got him at last!'

How thankful should every true penitent be, and how ready to give all the glory to God and grace! Be concerned to show that you have the disposition of angels. Pray for sinners to be brought to repentance, and rejoice when your prayers are answered.

LXVII.

UNBELIEF NOT OWING TO WANT OF EVIDENCE.

LUKE xvi. 31.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets; neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

THE obstinate infidelity of the human heart, and the artifices by which it conceals its own malignity, are truly

surprising. Notwithstanding the most solemn warnings of the divine word, men will hold fast deceit, and refuse to turn to the Lord. They will resist the plainest evidence; or if they acknowledge the truth to be undeniable, they will imprison it in unrighteousness. And when their own foolishness has perverted their way, they will attempt to lay the blame of their mistakes upon God; complaining that his ways were not equal, his word not explicit, or the means he used to reclaim them insufficient. In hell, indeed, their eyes will be opened, to see the futility of many pleas, by which they now deceive themselves; but the desire of finding at least some excuse for themselves, or some fault with the ways of God will remain, and will increase their guilt and misery. This seems intimated in the conclusion of this striking parable; while the language used by Abraham, assures us of the suitability and excellence of those means which God has chosen to adopt, and the insufficiency of others, which the conceit of man might prefer. His words are very solemn and interesting, and ought to be instructive and convincing. Let us endeavor,

FIRST, To illustrate this assertion, and show its credibility and reasonableness.

The writings of Moses and the Prophets are the means which God has actually chosen, to instruct and persuade mankind; and it is not fit that apostate creatures should prescribe to Divine Wisdom what method should be adopted for their recovery.

The writings of Moses and the Prophets are well adapted to enlighten and instruct the human mind; whereas the resurrection of one from the dead would tend to alarm and confuse the mind.

The inspired writings are means suited to persons of all ages and countries; but the resurrection of one from the dead, would either be of no general use; or being so often repeated, would lose its force of novelty, and then be disregarded, like other means of grace.

The evidence that Moses and the Prophets wrote under divine inspiration, are clear and decisive; but who can settle what evidence would be required, that one risen from the

dead, was neither mistaken himself, nor inclined to deceive us? A bad man's testimony might be suspected; and the goodness of a saint from glory disputed. How do we know who he is; that he was really dead, and raised again; is holy and happy; was commissioned by God to instruct us; or does not exceed his commission?

If the fact were often repeated, numberless queries would propounded and answered; and the answers given by one be compared with those received from another; while endless disputes would be occasioned by the forgetfulness, or the misapprehension of the relaters.

After the fervor occasioned by the novelty had abated, numberless impertinent questions would be asked, and men would be more solicitous to know the state of their departed neighbours, than to learn their own duty.

To discover the state of the dead to the living would supercede the business of the last day, and be inconsistent with God's plan of probation.

In short, if man had but a right spirit, the writings of Moses and the Prophets, (especially with the New Testament,) would be abundantly sufficient. They contain a just

delineation of the divine character; a declaration of the divine will; a discovery of our guilt and misery; and a display of salvation by grace.

They contain doctrines, duties, invitations, promises, motives, in rich abundance; such as nothing could resist but a heart of stone, a carnal mind, full of enmity against God and truth.

One risen from the dead might fill with surprise, might force an unwilling assent, might cause native enmity to hide itself; but could not change the heart: that would require superior energy, a power absolutely divine.

If, therefore, the Holy Scriptures do not win souls to God, no other means would produce that effect; but the hindrance must be of that kind which no means would remove. So

far as means are used in the conversion of a soul, God has appointed his word to be read and heard; and these means are well adapted to answer the end for which they were instituted. So far as these are insufficient, all others would be. Others might alarm more, but could not change the heart.

God alone can do that. I might have mentioned the resurrection of Lazarus and Christ. I proceed,

SECONDLY, To improve the doctrine of the text, by recommending the Holy Scriptures; and calling upon you to hear Moses and the Prophets, yea, Christ and his Apostles, and urging you to be persuaded by their counsels.

Has not Moses told you what God requires, and what he forbids? And will you not be persuaded to attend to your duty, and to forsake your sins? Moses and the Prophets have told you the awful consequences of sin; that the soul that sinneth shall die; that every one who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law, to do them, is cursed. If you regard them, you must believe Christ and his Apostles. Also, that by the deeds of the law, no flesh shall be justified.

Moses and the Prophets, as well as Christ and his Apostles, have assured you of the necessity of a sacrifice for sin; that without shedding of blood, there is no remission. Oh! be persuaded to look unto Jesus, whose precious blood cleanses from all sin. Acts iii. 22—24. x. 43. Rom. iii. 21—26.

Moses taught the necessity of the Lord's circumcising the heart. Deut. xxx. 6. The Prophets taught the necessity of his taking away the heart of stone, and of putting his fear into the heart. Jesus asserted, Ye must be born again. Alas! if ye believe not divine testimony, neither would ye be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

The inspired writers have unfolded to you the two eternal worlds. Have you been persuaded to flee from the wrath to come, and to receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child receives his inheritance?

Consider, how inexcusable and criminal are they who hear not the testimony of Moses and the Prophets, nor even that of the incarnate Son of God!

Reflect, how abundant are the external and internal evidences of the divine revelation! In vain do you object the difficulty of understanding them, or ascertaining their meaning. Did you ever take pains to understand the Holy Scriptures? Did you ever implore the aid of the Holy Spirit? Do you not slight and disregard the most incontestable truths? Do you truly regard all that you do understand?

If you do not understand the doctrines of the decrees, do you understand the doctrine of the commandments? Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. Did you ever get any thing by that? Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy. If you have a soul, is one day in the week too much to mind it? Thou shalt not covet. These surely are plain enough. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself. Are not these plain? Have you obeyed them? If not, are you not a sinner? and do you not need pardon?

You do not understand the doctrine of regeneration. Well, Do you understand the doctrine of repentance? If you do, repent, and believe the gospel. Do this thoroughly, without any special influence from above; and we will give up our doctrine of regeneration in your case; especially if you can persuade others to do the same.

But if you and others will not be persuaded, by all the motives in the Bible, to turn to God, we must believe that you are so obstinately wicked, that none but God can conquer you. You are dead in trespasses and sins. Though at the same time you are without excuse; for if you will not believe Moses and the Prophets, neither would you have been persuaded, though one rose from the dead; nor do you deserve that God should do more for you than he has done already; but if he should do so, it will be of his own sovereign will: and then you will not quarrel with him for so doing, nor for intending to do it.

Meanwhile, allow us who have been persuaded, to give all the praise to God, and to acknowledge that by grace we are saved, through faith, which was not of ourselves, but the gift of God.

LXVIII.

CHRIST'S DISCIPLES HATED FOR HIS SAKE.

LUKE xxi. 17.

And ye shall be hated of all men, for my name's sake.

Two thoughts very forcibly struck my mind at the first reading of this passage. Surely Jesus Christ was no

impostor, or he would never have made such a declaration as this, which was so ill calculated to entice men to follow him. Mahomet would have given no such warning, nor the Pope, who makes temporal prosperity a mark of the true church. Surely, if he was conscious of his own integrity and the goodness of his cause, he must have had a bad opinion of human nature. He must have held the doctrine of universal and total depravity, or he could never have seen need for such a warning. If men had any native virtue, they would not hate his disciples for his name's sake. I may add, that the correspondence of facts with this prediction is a further confirmation of the truth of Christianity.

But I shall not now dwell on the proof of this fact, but rather inquire a little into the reason of it. *Why are the true followers of Christ hated of all men, for his name's sake?*

It certainly is not merely for a name, for the bare sound of syllables, nor yet for a mere nominal profession; but on account of their principles and practices, that the world hates Christ's disciples. Nor is it because their sentiments or conduct are truly inimical or injurious to the welfare of men, but because they are contrary to their corrupt dispositions. Gen. iii. 15. "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Matt. x. 21, 22. xiii. 12, 13. John xv. 18—23.

FIRST: All men are *idolaters*, and therefore hate that religion which is calculate utterly to abolish idols, by exalting the one only living and true God. Before Christ, idolatry filled the earth. Heathen gods could coalesce; but Jehovah is a jealous God, scorns a rival, demands the whole heart, and condemns spiritual as well as gross idolatry.

SECONDLY: All men are naturally disposed to attempt to establish *their own righteousness*, and to confide therein; and therefore hate to be stripped thereof, and to be beholden to the atonement of Christ for salvation and eternal life. Hence Jews, Mahometans, and nominal Christians, hate saints.

THIRDLY: All men are full of *pride*, and therefore hate a

religion every part of which tends to humble man to the lowest degree. Not only the doctrines of the atonement and imputed righteousness, but those of efficacious grace, election, perseverance, &c. They cannot bear the idea that they need an atonement of infinite value; need renewing grace to make them willing to obey the call of the gospel, and return to God; are indebted to free, sovereign love for their whole salvation; are kept only by the mighty power of God. If some carnal men profess to admit these truths, they pervert and distort them; and no men more bitterly hate those who admit the genuine doctrine in all its bearings.

FOURTHLY: All men love a state of *carnal security*, and therefore hate the true disciples of Christ. Because the earnestness, solicitude, fear, or joy of Christians condemns their indifference and unconcernedness. Hence opposite complaints are frequently made of Christians, even by the same persons. And because the love of Christ and souls constrains believers to disturb their sinful peace and carnal security, by their admonitions and exhortations. Oh that it were more so!

FIFTHLY: All unrenewed men *love sin*, and therefore hate the religion and people of Christ for their purity; because they will not run to the same excess of riot; nor make provision, like them, for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts. 1 Pet. iv. 1—4.

SIXTHLY: All men are fond of *carnal ease*, and therefore hate them who embrace a religion which requires unwearied diligence, self-denial, and warfare against sin; struggling with Satan and the powers of darkness; pressing on continually "towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Toiling as it were up the hill.

SEVENTHLY: All men are criminally attached to present *earthly enjoyments*, and therefore hate the true disciples of Christ, who are strangers and pilgrims on earth; declaring, both by words and deeds, the necessity of seeking a spiritual happiness in a future and invisible world. Hence we may derive a use of

Instruction.—How irreconcilable is real Christianity with the spirit and manners of the world in general! Marvel not that the world hates Christ's followers: remember how it hated him, before it hated us. 1 John v. 19. How necessary is regeneration to a cordial reception of Christianity! Yet why is it thus necessary? Not because the gospel is contrary to right reason, or unworthy of all acceptation: but because the carnal mind is enmity against God and his holy law; and no less so against that Mediator, who, by his obedience unto death, has magnified the law and made it honorable. He that hates the Father, must hate his only-begotten Son; and *vice versa*. John viii. 42. xv. 23, 24. We derive also a use of

Reproof.—How little of Christianity have most who profess it! It is not much to our credit that we are so little hated by the world, if the reason be, as I fear it is, our too great resemblance to the world. John vii. 7. We add a use of

Exhortation.—Let us, however, see to it, that if men hate us, it shall be only for Christ's sake; and if they speak evil of us, let it be falsely. Aim not at singularity merely for the sake of appearing singular; but be universally and strictly conscientious. Neglect not the most unfashionable duties; but be sure not to neglect those that are generally acceptable to men. Let none have room to hate you for unchristian bitterness, moroseness, pride, or contempt of others. Nor for hypocrisy and inconsistency, hard heartedness, or unwillingness to give to them that need. Prove that you love them that hate you. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. Be pitiful, be courteous. Cut off occasion from those that seek it.

It is not a sufficient sign that a person is right, that he is odious in the eyes of many; nor is it by any means a sign against his being a true Christian, that he is despised, reviled, and persecuted. Remember, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." Be encouraged to bear Christ's reproach. Oh! he is worthy that we should suffer for him! In patience possess your souls. In a sense, hate all for Christ. Show that you are crucified to the world.

LXIX.

AGAINST SENSUALITY AND WORLDLY CARES.

LUKE xxi. 34.

And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.

MY brethren ! you will not be offended at my recommending to your notice, a caution, given by our Lord himself to his own disciples. You will not think that warning to be needless for the best of you, which he thought needful even for his apostles. Far be it from me to indulge groundless suspicions of religious professors, or to insinuate reflections on any, respecting evils which cannot be laid to their charge. There may be persons unknown to me, who need to be exhorted against intemperance, and that in particular at the present season of the year, at which many profess to celebrate the birth of Christ. And I remember once overhearing a profane man, who said to a person I knew, " You know we *must* serve the devil a little at Christmas ! " And though few would make such a declaration, I fear it accords with the practice of many. You will not suspect me of designing to reflect on good people, who observe the 25th of December, in commemoration of our Lord's birth. On this point, I would observe Rom. xiv. 5. Indeed I have no design to confine the passage to the correction of abuses at one season of the year, but rather to apply it in the most extensive sense. Let us consider,

FIRST, The evils against which we are warned.

Surfeiting and drunkenness.—The second evil here named is the most disreputable, though it would be well if it were held in greater and more universal detestation. It is injurious to the circumstances, the bodily constitution, the character, family order, and comfort. It interrupts the exercise of reason, it exposes to numberless temptations, it unfits for every present duty, and takes away the heart from God. In its higher degrees, it makes a man like a fool or a madman, and sinks him below the beasts. But in-

temperance in the indulgence of our other appetite, is also injurious to the body and the soul; is the foundation of many disorders, and often the cause of sudden death. It is unworthy a rational creature, and especially a professed follower of Christ. It leads to needless waste; and if it does not impoverish, it lessens the ability to do good; unfits for private and family worship, and for communion with God.

The *cares of this life*, or worldly anxieties, are more plausible excuses for duty, and more general snares to the souls of men. Here we should be careful how we decide on the conduct of others; but should all be very jealous of ourselves. The poverty of many is a temptation to anxiety about this life, and they are ready to plead that it is excusable in them to be wholly occupied in these concerns. Many avow that they have no time to mind their souls, nor to seek after eternal life. But this plea will not do, to satisfy God, or even their own conscience at last. Others cannot deny that they have already a sufficiency, and even more, and yet they have not the more time for God. No; they have so much business; their concerns are so extensive, they occupy all their time; and yet they are so fascinated with the prospect of larger gains, that, instead of contracting their business, they wish to enlarge it; and so they go on, till they are suddenly laid aside from all, and called out of the world with little or no notice.

Christians indeed, are not of the world. They are here but strangers and pilgrims. Yet it is their duty to provide things honest in the sight of all. They must eat and drink, and should be thankful for what God has given them. They are not sullenly to refuse the comforts of this life, when God has put them in their power. But they must use this world as not abusing it. Some may be tried with poverty and adversity, but they need not indulge distrustful anxiety. Others may be called to carry on extensive worldly concerns, and they are not obliged to leave their situation, or confine themselves exactly to a line drawn by other men. But they *must* mind the admonition of their best friend. They *must* beware, lest the love of other things should choke the word and make it unfruitful, or lest

their hearts be overcharged.
sider,

This leads us to con-

SECONDLY, The pernicious effects that would follow from indulging them. These things are said, to *overcharge the heart*.

The heart that is overcharged with sensual indulgencies or worldly cares, will be proportionably deadened to the influence of invisible realities.

If our main concern is spent upon earthly things, and it is treated as our chief business to enjoy or secure the things of time; this is inconsistent with any due regard to God's glory, or to the enjoyment of his heavenly kingdom.

Though we may not seek earthly things by dishonorable means, or use them in a scandalous manner, our hearts may be overcharged with the anxieties of life, if they leave us no time, or very little, for God and our souls. Not that the measure of religion is determined by length of time.

If we are not more anxious to make our calling and election sure, to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, yea, and to grow in grace, than we are to secure worldly enjoyments and possessions, it is a sign our hearts are thus overcharged.

The cares of this life overcharge the heart, when they prevail upon us to curtail religious duties, to neglect secret devotion, family religion, and the sanctification of the Lord's day. Which is pleasant? which burdensome?

The heart is overcharged with the world, when parents find worldly motives outweigh religious ones, in providing situations, or planning connexions for their children. When they are willing to expose young persons, unnecessarily, to great temptation, for the sake of superior worldly advantages.

When the heart is thus overcharged, we shall forget our dependance on God for success in things lawful, forget to thank him for the bounties of his providence, and forget our obligations to act as his stewards in the disposal of all.

Such inordinate affection to earthly things, would turn blessings into curses, make crosses doubly heavy and galling, and success ensnaring.

The heart that is thus overcharged, cannot be greatly set on things above; will be filled with anguish and confusion at the thought of parting with these idolized possessions; will be sadly

surprised by sudden death, and unfit to meet with the king of terrors.

THIRDLY : The manner in which we must guard against them. We are charged to *take heed* to ourselves, and that *continually*, lest *at any time* our hearts be thus overcharged.

We are not so to trust to the habit of grace, as to intermit the exercise of it; but be continually on our guard, as knowing the deceitfulness of sin. We need, especially, to

watch against the sins that have formerly had the mastery, and easily beset us; and not be secure, even as to those we may have been the freest from hitherto. We must

watch, especially, on every change of circumstances, against fresh temptations. It may be, some, who stood their ground under easy circumstances, will be overcharged on meeting trials of adversity. Others, who stood their ground well against adversity, may suffer great loss by the snares of prosperity. We must watch and pray always. Unite these

duties. If your care be mixed with self-confidence, and spring only from a selfish concern for your honor among men, that will do little. If prayer be not attended with circumspection, it is presumptuous. Make the world subservient; let that give way, if one must. We must watch against the

beginnings of temptation. A little sinful indulgence may gradually lead on to far worse. Beware of inordinate attachment, even to lawful enjoyments. Seek the supply of the Spirit, to mortify every sinful propensity, to regulate every natural desire, to keep the heart fixed for God, and to impress the mind with a conviction of the vanity of the world and the importance of the things that are unseen.

LXX.

CHRIST THE LIFE OF MEN.

JOHN i. 4.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

THE whole of this introductory part of John's Gospel, is exceedingly instructive to those, who have felt their need of

a divine and almighty Saviour, and who, adopting the language of the 14th verse, can say, "We have seen his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father." For the divinity of our blessed Lord, is maintained by this Evangelist in the strongest terms. He is styled the WORD, as having manifested the perfections, will, and secret counsels of God to man; and, indeed he has, by the salvation of the church, displayed to the holy inhabitants of heaven, more of God than they would otherwise have known. Not only is it affirmed that the Word, or Son of God, existed previous to his being made flesh, but he is said to have been in the beginning with God, and to be God, the Creator of all things.

But on these particulars we cannot now enlarge. It is here said, *In him was life, and the life was the light of men*; which many explain in connexion with the preceding verse, as affirming that he is the Author of life and light in general, giving to mankind the light of reason and revelation; which is very true, but I think not the *whole* truth, nor do I think it is the *chief* thing here intended. What thoughts the passage has suggested, that appear to me most interesting, I will lay before you.

FIRST: It is here affirmed of our blessed Lord, that *in him was life*. The expression may denote, either, the life he possesses, or the life he communicates. The former must be included, though I conceive the latter is chiefly intended.

In him life *resides*. He is the true and living God. Yea, since his incarnation, he styles himself, the living one, who once became dead, but is now alive for evermore, and has the keys of hell and of death. Rev. i. 18. And as he is the eternal and immortal Son of God, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever, as touching his divine nature; so when he assumed humanity, he was Lord over his own life, and had power to lay it down and to take it up again. John x. 18.

But I conceive the Apostle refers especially, to the life *communicated* from the Word, or Son of God, to dying, ruined men; not merely natural, but spiritual and eternal. Nor is it strange, that the Apostle should pass so speedily from the

work of creation to the work of redemption ; since the latter is the chief end of the former, and is that which chiefly displays the ineffable glory of the Son of God. This important truth is often declared in the New Testament, and particularly by this apostle, John ; as in his Gospel, v. 26. "The Father hath given the Son to have life in himself." i. e. According to the covenant of redemption, it is conceded that he should, in consequence of his obedience unto death, give eternal life to all his elect. See John xvii. 2. also Rom. vi. 23. "The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord." 2 Tim. i. 1. "The promise of eternal life, which is in Christ Jesus." 1 John v. 11. "The gift of God is eternal life, and this life is in his Son." Therefore, Christ is called the Prince of Life. Acts iii. 15. The Tree of Life. Prov. iii. 18. Rev. ii. 7. The Bread of Life. John vi. 33. 35. 48. The Word of Life. 1 John i. 1. Thus life *was* in him, who was set up from everlasting as the federal head of his people, who were chosen in him, and to whom, God, who cannot lie, promised eternal life, before the world began. Compare Eph. i. 4. iii. 11. Titus i. 2. This was manifested in the first promise, on account of which Eve was stiled the mother of all living ; as being, not only preserved to be the parent of an innumerable posterity, but as destined to have this promised seed, in whom all nations should be blessed, descend from her. Life appeared to be in him, when in the fulness of time he came into the world, to redeem his people from death, to publish the words of eternal life, declaring himself to be the way, the truth, and the life. John xiv. 6. And when, after his resurrection, he commissioned repentance unto life and remission of sins to be published among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. It appears, that life is in him, when dead sinners are made to hear his voice and live. John v. 25. Eph. ii. 1. It shall appear that life is in him, when at the last day, he will, as Judge of the world, award eternal life to all his people, after having raised their bodies from the grave. John v. 28. vi. 39, 40. In him is life ; and well might Peter say, "Lord, to whom shall we go ? thou hast the words of eternal life. John vi. 68.

SECONDLY: It is here affirmed, That the life which was in Christ is *the light of men*.

The life that was in him, especially when here below, was the light of men, as his *living example* beautifully illustrates our duty, and God's gracious designs. By noticing our Lord's life, while in his state of humiliation, we see, in the clearest and most lovely manner, what sort of life his followers ought to live on earth, in all holiness, and rectitude, and benevolence. We see also, how much Divine Goodness was set upon the salvation of sinners, though in such a way as to condemn sin; and what encouragement we have to return to God, through this blessed Redeemer.

The life was the light of men, inasmuch as it is only in consequence of the communication of *spiritual life* from Christ Jesus, that any man is enabled rightly to discern, even his own true interest, and to see all divine truth in a just light. Self-love is the blindest affection in the world. Mere objective light, however strong, will not suffice, unless life also is imparted; it shines into darkness, but the darkness apprehends it not. External light will not open the eyes of the blind; nor will the clearest revelation, without quickening influence, produce just ideas of religion; nor will mere natural strength of intellect. Hence, none are more blind, as to divine things, than many of the wise, prudent, and learned of this world. A new heart, a right spirit, will lead to a new use of the understanding: but no increase of intellectual capacity or speculative knowledge will sanctify the heart.

Hence it is, that many unregenerate men talk so absurdly of the plainest truths of religion, and so inconsistently with common sense, and their own acknowledged principles. e. g. How absurd for those, who do not pretend to be Atheists, to ridicule prayer, serious concern about religion, and anxious preparation for eternity. For persons, who do not pretend to be Deists, to despise the ministry of the word; condemning, not an individual, or a number of ministers, but all who wear that character: or condemning all who take more delight in God's word and ordinances, than in what they call innocent diversions. Or for those, who do not pretend to deny gospel doctrines, yet to continue at ease in

their sins. Alas ! unless Christ shall impart life by his Holy Spirit, men will love darkness and rebel against the light.

The life which Christ has promised hereafter to bestow on his people, is the light of men : his promises of *eternal life*, animate our hopes, and are sufficient to cheer us in the gloom of adversity, and even when passing through the valley of the shadow of death. Ah ! what is there but the life which Christ has brought to light by his gospel, that can afford solid satisfaction, even while we are exempt from extraordinary trouble ? How much less, when we feel that we must soon leave all things here below, and enter on another state ; passing into an invisible world, and having our state fixed for ever ! Happy they, who, though dead to the world while in it, and expecting soon to die and leave it, have a life hid with Christ in God. Have we ever been convinced that all the descendants of the first Adam, are the subjects of spiritual death, and obnoxious to eternal death ? Have we been made to feel that this is the wages of sin ? Are we willing to receive eternal life as a free gift, and that imparted through the Mediator ? Are we willing to live to God here, and to be led by his light and his truth, that we may live with him for ever ?

Have we been made partakers of spiritual life already, being so joined unto the Lord as to be one spirit with him ? having a disposition for holy activity and gracious affections, so that we can truly adopt Paul's language, " I am crucified with Christ ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Have we, in consequence of the influence of the quickening Spirit, been made light in the Lord, though we were sometime ago in darkness ? Have we been brought out of that darkness into marvellous light ? Oh ! walk as the children of the light and of the day : have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. Let your light so shine before men, that they, beholding your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven.

If you are strangers to the life of God, utter darkness and eternal death are before you ! You must soon be rescued from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, or you will be lost for ever.

LXXI.

CHRIST AN EXAMPLE OF ZEAL.

JOHN ii. 17.

The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.

THIS expression is quoted from Psalm lxix. 9. A Psalm composed by David ; but which several quotations in the New Testament teach us to refer immediately to the Messiah. These words were brought to the mind of our Lord's disciples, when they saw him drive the buyers and sellers out of the temple. The Jews, in the next verse, demanded a sign, to prove his authority for so doing ; but there could not well be a greater miracle than the act itself. When we think how many thousands of Jews were assembled at the feast of the passover, it must have been like a large fair, which was held in the courts of the temple, to furnish them with sacrifices and paschal lambs. And that a plain countryman from Galilee should be able to overcome all the traders, whom the priests had thus encouraged to crowd the temple, was an astonishing instance, not only of zeal, but of a divine power over the minds of this covetous and resentful throng.

I wish, however, to take up the subject in a more general view, and would pursue the following method. I would,

FIRST, Explain the import of the phrase.

Zeal, is the fervor of love, conjoined with the warmest opposition to every thing contrary to the beloved object ; exciting to diligent concern for the honor and interest of that object.

The zeal of *God's house*, is zeal for his worship and ordinances ; delighting in attendance upon them ; in preserving them pure and entire ; and opposing all neglect, abuse, or corruption of them ; taking pleasure in seeing and exciting a suitable attachment to them in others.

For zeal to *eat one up*, is, for it to have full possession of the soul, influencing all its powers, and shining forth in the outward conduct : so that it draws the attention entirely to its proper object, and makes a man impartial and constant in promoting the divine honor, and in strenuously opposing all that would dishonor God. Whereinsoever the divine

glory calls him to action, he would go in the path of duty, regardless of consequences, and fearless of dangers. He is filled with painful concern for any thing which tends to God's dishonor; but will, by no means, be deterred from his service himself, nor from laboring to excite others to a punctual discharge of their duty. Every thing, with him, must give way to religion, or be rendered in some way subservient to it.

There is probably an allusion to the fire from heaven, which fell on the sacrifices, and consumed them. So all our Lord's strength and spirits were employed and spent in his Father's service, and his life, at last, was made a sacrifice for his glory. But let me more particularly,

SECONDLY, Show the propriety of its application to Christ.

How justly was this expression applied to him, whose heart always burnt with this heavenly fire! At twelve years old, he said, "Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" He was careful to fulfil all righteousness; all moral, and all positive duties. Throughout his public ministry, he was unwearied in teaching and doing the will of God. He always opposed sin, with the greatest firmness. None could convict him of sin, in any thing. And never did he connive at sin in others: not in the highest pretenders to sanctity. Yea, not in his own dear disciples, however disguised, or mixed with zeal for himself. "Get thee behind me, Satan." "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." On this occasion, and on a similar one later, (Matt. xxi. 12. Mark xi. 15. Luke xix. 45.) bearing testimony against all the abuses of the Jews. Especially, his giving himself at last a ransom for many; laying down his life; making his soul an offering for sin; consenting that the temple of his body should be demolished, as it were, though he would raise it up again the third day. All this was from zeal for God's glory, the honor of all his glorious perfections. That justice and mercy might meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other. He tabernacled in human flesh on purpose, that in consequence of his dying for his people, he might form them into a living

temple, an habitation of God, through the Spirit. Let us consider,

THIRDLY, The reasonableness of imitating his example.

Consider the excellence of the divine nature, and moral character, and say, Is not God worthy of ardent zeal?

Consider the importance of his kingdom among men. How wonderful, that he will condescend to dwell among them! What reason is there that we should subserve his gracious designs with all our powers!

His benefits conferred on us individually, claim our grateful and strenuous exertions in his cause.

He who deserved all the zeal, and services, and sufferings of Christ, surely deserves all that we can give.

What Christ has done and suffered, confirms and increases our obligations. All he did for God, was also done for us, for our highest benefit; and at the same time was intended to be an example.

Can we bear lukewarmness, when we reflect on his amazing love? Must it not give the lie to our profession, if we serve him with indifference?

How short is the time in which any difficulty will attend his service! And how much is there to counterbalance every present disagreeable circumstance!

Consider, how transitory are our sufferings, and how long will be the season of rest and enjoyment?

He does not send us on a warfare at our own charges, but encourages us to live on his fulness. He has promised the aid of his Holy Spirit; is always at hand to defend us; and will own those before angels, who own him before men.

Consider,

FOURTHLY, The way in which we should manifest this disposition, if we have the same mind in us that was in Christ Jesus.

Shall we not manifest it by a readiness to attend on God's ordinances, and a concern to encourage the like care in others?

Shall we not be careful to keep all God's ordinances pure, according to their original appointment?

Shall we be content with bare attendance on them, or shall we not want communion with God in them?

Will it not grieve us to see others negligent of God's ordinances; formal, hypocritical, and inconsistent

in their walk and conversation with their profession? If the zeal of God's house doth eat us up, we shall not do the little we do with grudging, but should think it an honor, a privilege to subserve his cause, like David. (1 Chron. xxix. 14.) "Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer after this sort?"

We shall be glad to deny ourselves in other respects, that we may gratify ourselves by serving Christ's cause.

We shall be careful to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, and be concerned to recommend religion to others. We shall be anxious for the coming of Christ's kingdom among men, planning and contriving new means to promote it.

We shall make zealous opposition against error and sin, especially in ourselves, and those we are most nearly connected with.

Impatient of serving God so feebly and imperfectly, we shall long to enter on a state of perfection, that we may serve him without interruption or defect.

Oh brethren! how few of us can adopt this language in sincerity! With what abatements and exceptions must we use it! When we think of the warmth of Christ's love to us, which some of us have so often celebrated at his table, how must we blush at the coldness of our love to him! How ready was he to deny himself for us; but how backward have we been to deny ourselves for him! How much more willingly did he lay out all his time and strength for us, than we ever laid out ourselves for him! If we were to be called, like the martyrs, to die for him, surely our zeal must be strangely increased, or we should make a poor hand of sufferings, when we are so little active in a time of the greatest ease the church ever knew. Oh! may we look to the author and finisher of faith, for an increase of faith, love, and zeal!

LXXII.

ON SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES.

JOHN v. 39.

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

SUCH was the charge given by our Lord to the Jews, referring, doubtless, to the writings of the Old Testament,

for the New was not then extant. And his appeal ought to have had great weight with them, who admitted they contained the directions needful for obtaining eternal life ; and who acknowledged that they foretold a Messiah, and gave an account of many particulars respecting him. Let then the pretensions of Jesus be tried by this standard, and his claim to the character of the true Messiah stand or fall, as they accorded or not with these ancient predictions. How different was the case of Mahomet ! He was introduced by no prophecies. If the Old and New Testament are true, as he allowed, Christ's kingdom was to have no end. Nor could the promise of the Holy Spirit apply to him, who surely was not holy, but impure ; not a comforter, but a destroyer. And how strongly does it confirm the whole Bible, that it should be thus divided into two parts ; the former of which, according to the testimony of the most inveterate enemies of Christianity, was written long before the latter, and yet fully accords with it. Like a lock with intricate wards, and a key exactly corresponding. There is therefore abundant reason to apply the injunction given to the Jews to other persons, who have now opportunity to examine the whole system of divine revelation ; and to exhort you in particular, who have the complete canon of scripture, to search those sacred writings. At the same time, as it is no light matter, it will be worth while to inquire, in what manner this injunction should be obeyed. Consider,

FIRST, The reasonableness of our urging you to search the scriptures.

I might expect it would have some weight with the curiosity of the young, to plead that they are (some of them, at least,) by far the oldest writings in the world : that the best scholars, and men of the finest taste have admired them, as containing the most sublime specimens of eloquence. Where will you find simplicity and pathos, equal to Judah's speech to Joseph ; or awful sublimity, to compare with Isaiah xiv. ? The histories are generally interesting, and perfectly free from all appearance of art. How devoid of invective or panygeric ! Their impartiality is a most striking feature ; as in the instances of David, Hezekiah, and Peter. Nor is their harmony less

observable. The Old Testament contains thirty-nine books, by at least twenty-six authors; the New Testament, twenty-seven books, by nine authors. All Jews indeed, but living at the distance of nearly sixteen hundred years. There are a few difficulties of chronology and history; and some circumstances mentioned by one, are omitted by another. And if a verbal or numeral error has crept in, in above 3300 years, it cannot invalidate their authenticity, when there is so striking an agreement in doctrine, sentiment, and facts.

But it is of far superior moment, respecting these writings, that they profess to be a revelation from God, and no other pretended revelation can compare with them. If they are discarded, no one here will pretend to supply their place with a better; nor to indulge the hope of one hereafter, if 6000 years have elapsed without God's interposition.

Nor can any one reasonably prefer the moral state of those countries which never pretended to a revelation. We need a revelation greatly, to know the origin and Author of the world; the design of our Maker, in placing us here; the way in which he would be worshipped; to fix a standard of duty; to point out the way to happiness; to ascertain a future state; and to unfold our eternal destiny.

The Holy Scriptures are confirmed by very strong evidences. By miracles; by prophecies; by the moral character of the penmen. It is incredible, such a character as that of Christ should have no prototype. Surely it never could have been imagined, or delineated by impostors, who yet do not panegyryze him.

The good tendency of the doctrines is another most powerful argument. The great facts of Christianity obtained credit on the spot, where they could have been most easily contradicted; and have still maintained their credit, notwithstanding the greatest opposition, by force, argument, and ridicule. They have had the most salutary effect in every change of circumstances; in life, and in death. We allow they have been the occasion of mischief. So have other most valuable gifts of God. Corn, wine, iron, &c. But do the Sacred Scriptures authorize persecution? No; search for yourselves. Blame not the scriptures for the faults of

those that disobey them. Examine, What do they teach? not, How do pretenders act, whose hypocrisy was foretold and reprobated? Dare not to reject any probable directory from heaven, without serious examination, and clear evidence of its falsehood. See to it, that you are able to say, 'I would thankfully have yielded to divine authority, if I could have found a revelation credibly sanctioned.'

But probably most of you admit the claim of the scriptures; while I fear some disregard their contents. You own them to be the word of God, yet do not search them, at least, not properly. You then, like the Jews, must be self-condemned. Let us then inquire into,

SECONDLY, The manner in which such a search should be conducted.

Search the scriptures with *candor* and *impartiality*. If you search them unfairly, merely with a view to find objections to their authority or their contents, is it any wonder that you should mistake? Is it not just that God should give you up to error?

The scriptures must be searched *seriously*; not with levity, or a trifling spirit. They relate to very serious subjects: God, the soul, duty, salvation, the eternal world.

They should be searched with *diligence* and *earnestness*, as by those who wish to know the very truth, the whole truth, and to be kept from all mistakes.

It is not likely that we shall profit by them, if we do not search them with a *right spirit*; i. e. a *docile* spirit, willing to be taught and instructed; a spirit of *subordination*, willing to be governed by divine authority, and comply with God's commands; a spirit of *self-denial*, willing to be restrained, and to give up our lusts without reserve; a spirit of *humility*, willing to credit God's testimony and to admit his claims and charges. It is true, the doctrines of scripture may be mysterious, humiliating, involving a heavy charge of guilt, precluding all boasting, and securing glory to God.

Search the scriptures with *prayer*, especially for the *Holy Spirit*, that you may understand the *Holy Scriptures*. Our Lord assures you how ready God is to give his Holy Spirit.

Luke xi. 13. And Paul teaches you how necessary this is.
1 Cor. ii. 14.

Search the scriptures with *self-application*, or with a view to yourselves. 'Thus God describes *me*. This he demands of *me*. This he forbids *me*. This invitation warrants *me* to apply.'

Search the scriptures with a view to find *Christ* and *salvation* in them. "They are they that testify of me." He is the central point of revelation. *Antecedent* truths show the need of him, and *consequent* truths derive their force from him. Nothing so much concerns us as to know Christ, and the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

Search the scriptures, with a view to know your *whole duty*. What the law enjoins; what the gospel enforces; whither the whole system of doctrine tends.

Search, with a view to the full enjoyment of *eternal life*: that you may partake of all the privileges of the children of God, both here and hereafter; that you may know you are born of God. If that be the case, you are secured from condemnation: all things are conspiring to promote your eternal interests; and your present light afflictions, which last but for a moment, shall work out for you a weight of glory, which shall far more than counterbalance them, and endure to eternity.

Ah! my friends, if the Bible is true, such prospects are before you; such blessings are proposed to your acceptance! You are authorized to take them without money and without price; you are urged by all the authority and compassion of God, to accept of them; you cannot miss them, but by a voluntary rejection of the Son of God. Do you wish the Bible was not true? And why? That you may enjoy the pleasures of sin, and obtain the prize of annihilation!

LXXIII.

NONE REJECTED BY CHRIST.

JOHN vi. 37.

And him that cometh to me, I will in nowise cast out.

OF all the sentences which ever fell, even from the mouth of him, "who spake as never man spake," and made his

hearers wonder at the gracious words that fell from his lips, there never was one that was more gracious than this, nor one that would be more interesting to us, if we understood the true character of the speaker, and knew our own real circumstances. I earnestly wish I could place it in such a light as to excite the attention of all my hearers, and persuade you to come to this merciful Saviour; for though many have hitherto sadly neglected him, yet I am sure that you all stand in great need of him.

Some, I fear, never gave themselves any concern about this blessed Redeemer; while others, perhaps, yield so careless an assent to this declaration, as to infer, that because Christ says, "I will in nowise cast out;" therefore they need not come at all; or at least, need not come yet. They think that they may have all the blessings of salvation without coming; or, that they may come without moving, without any strong emotion of mind, without any effort, without any difficulty, or any striving against objections. Why, say you, 'What can there be to obstruct after this declaration?' Nothing on *his* part; but then there may be many things on *yours*. He is willing to receive you, but perhaps you are not willing to come to him. While others, who begin to think seriously about coming, see so many reasons why he might justly reject them, that they can hardly believe what he affirms in our text.

The language here used is very strong and peremptory; but while it affords the highest encouragement to apply to the Saviour, it implies, that without this assurance there would have been great room to fear, in the case of many, if not of all, who apply to him. We may therefore found several interesting inquiries on these words, e. g. Why *do* any come to him; and why *should* we come to him? What ground should we have had for suspicion, that he might cast us out, if he had not given so positive an assurance to the contrary? And what considerations may best satisfy us, that notwithstanding all, he will in nowise cast out any who come to him? We will unite the two first inquiries, and can hardly keep the latter quite distinct, though we will attend to it more fully separately.

FIRST: For what reasons do any come to Christ; and on what account are they apt to fear being rejected?

They see a correspondence between the characters in which he is revealed, and their own necessitous circumstances; and yet they see grounds of objection, that might be made, if he were not wonderfully gracious. For example,

Christ is revealed as the *great instructor* of mankind; the *prophet*, who should fully make known the will of God. Now, says the soul that comes to Christ, 'I greatly need to be instructed by him, for I am very ignorant; but I fear I am too much so, for him to receive me. I am so dull, so slow of heart to embrace the truth; I have indulged groundless prejudices, and loved darkness rather than light. Will he admit me into his school? Will he accept me as his disciple? He may well upbraid me with past errors; his patience may well be exhausted by my dullness and forgetfulness. I shall need line upon line, and precept upon precept. I shall need him, not only to open to me the scriptures, but to open my understanding; yea, to open my heart, that I may receive the truth in the love of it.' Well, hear what he says, and apply for instruction: *Him that cometh to me, I will in nowise cast out.*

He is revealed as the *physician* of souls. Have you no need to apply to him in this character? or does nothing ail you? or, can you heal yourself? 'Oh! yes, I *need* him. I have tried all others in vain: *but* my disease is so inveterate; it has infected my frame so universally, it is so enfeebling, so loathsome, so tormenting, so deadly, that I fear he will cast me out; especially as I know my case is not merely pitiable, but hateful and criminal: the more I need his aid, the less I deserve it.' Well, but what said he? "The whole have no need of a physician, but the sick." And what says the text? *Him that cometh to me, I will in nowise cast out.*

He is a wonderful *counsellor*, and a gracious *advocate*. 'But my cause is confessedly a bad one, very intricate; my accuser has much to say against me, nor can I deny the truth of his charge.' Now it is certain, that this advocate is emphatically and justly denominated Jesus Christ.

the righteous; and he never will advance a plea inconsistent with truth and righteousness for any one; yet he can effectually plead your cause, and insure your justification from every charge. And you hear what he has said: *Him that cometh to me, I will in nowise cast out.*

He is revealed in the character of a *great high priest*; ordained for men, in things pertaining to God, that he might offer both gifts and sacrifice for sin, and make intercession for all them that come unto God by him. Now he hath put away sin, by the sacrifice of himself; for he bore our sins in his own body on the tree; he made his soul an offering for sin; and now his blood cleanses from all sin; for he is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world; he has obtained eternal redemption, and is able to save to the uttermost. But say you, 'My guilt is immense; my sins are so aggravated, so multiplied, so deserving the divine displeasure, that I fear he will utterly reject me.' Well, would your blood, do you think, satisfy justice better than the precious blood of Christ? Would your death display God's abhorrence of sin more strongly than the death of his Son? Could any valuable end to the universe be better answered by it? For whom should he die, but for those that deserved death? for whom be made a curse, but for those who were justly obnoxious to the curse of the law? If Christ died for them that never deserved to die, his death was the most shocking of all events, and must be an indelible dishonor to God's moral government. What is to make him amends for all his sufferings, but the redemption of lost souls? 'Still I fear he will reject me.' Who could show the riches of his grace, and the efficacy of his atonement more? And what has he affirmed in the text? *Him that cometh to me, I will in nowise cast out.*

He is revealed as a *king*, and the *captain* of salvation. 'But will he accept of such adherents as went down to his ancestor after the flesh, to the cave Adullam. 1 Sam. xxii. 2. Will he accept of deserters from his grand enemy?' Try. 'Can he inspire cowards with courage? make strong out of weakness? strengthen the spoiled against the strong? and make them that have no might, more than conquerors? I

am sure he can, and sure he will. *Him that cometh to me, I will in nowise cast out.*

SECONDLY : What considerations may best satisfy us that he will in nowise cast out any one who comes to him ?

His word ought to satisfy you. He could not speak more positively, more indefinitely, or more extensively ; and nothing could induce him to say it, if he did not mean to keep his word ; nor can any thing induce him to break it.

His assuming these characters, his coming into our world, taking on him our nature, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, fully confirms it. None of these things could be needful for any other end ; and no good end can be answered by all he has already done, but the salvation of just such as you.

His conduct in the days of his flesh confirms it. He then cast out no one who applied to him. Not the Samaritan woman, at the well of Sychar ; the woman who had been a notorious sinner ; the poor Syro-phœnician ; the thief on the cross, &c.

His conduct ever since testifies the same. “ He ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” His kindness to Saul of Tarsus, to millions of Jews and Gentiles, are proofs of this. To the church at Corinth also ; some of whom, before their conversion, were the very vilest of sinners. After enumerating the characters which could not be permitted to enter the kingdom of heaven, the Apostle adds—“ *And such were some of you ; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*” Who ever applied to him in vain ? Here are many witnesses present. Some tried him early, and some tried him late ; but none came too soon, and in one sense, none too late. ‘ *Then I may delay.*’ *Delay* what ? *Delay* being safe ? *delay* being happy ? *delay*, till you are cut off by some unexpected accident ? *delay*, till you are delirious ? *delay*, till you are paralytic ? *delay*, till you are given up to judicial hardness of heart ? Oh ! folly ! Oh ! madness !

LXXIV.

THE SPIRITUAL PARTICIPATION OF CHRIST.

JOHN vi. 53—57.

Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.

“NEVER man spake like this man,” said the officers, when the chief priests and pharisees sent to apprehend Jesus. (vii. 46.) I should use the same exclamation; but in a far worse sense than that in which they intended it to be taken, if I could be brought to doubt of the divinity, incarnation, and atonement of Christ. See how our Lord, in the preceding discourse, repeatedly insists upon it, that he was the true bread from heaven, in a superior sense to the manna,—even the bread of life. Notice with what an asseveration he reaffirms it in the text, dilating on the idea, and enforcing it, both negatively and positively.

Surely, if all this means no more than that he was a good teacher of morality, so that his doctrine might be called the food of a virtuous soul; then if any one should infer, that no man ever spake so figuratively, so incautiously, so unintelligibly, or in a way so likely to be misunderstood, I could not deny the charge. I propose, therefore,

FIRST, To state the only ground on which it appears to me that the language of the text can be justified, or indeed be fairly explained.

That he who thus spake of himself was a divine person, who became incarnate, for the express purpose of reconciling apostate, guilty, hell-deserving sinners unto God, by his obedience unto death; his blood being shed, and his soul made an offering for sin; that so God's infinite abhorrence of moral evil might not be rendered dubious by his exempting

sinner from the infliction of eternal evil; or by his treating those sinners who believe in the Saviour, and return unto God in his name, in a way directly contrary to their personal deserts.

He must have existed previous to his appearance in our world; therefore it is said, he came down from heaven, (ver. 33. 38. 51,) and that he afterward should ascend up, where he was before. Ver. 62. Without admitting this, I cannot understand such phrases as (1 John iv. 2, 3.) "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh." Nor, (Rom. ix. 5.) "Of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came." John remarks, (i. 14.) "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." And Paul says, (1 Tim. iii. 16.) "The great mystery of godliness, is, God manifest in the flesh."

Hence we infer, not barely his pre-existence, but his proper divinity. He was in the beginning with God, and he was God: not as the first and greatest of creatures, but as himself the Creator. John i. 3. Col. i. 16. Hence he spake of himself, even in his state of humiliation, as being "in heaven." John iii. 13. And he promised to be with his disciples, by his divine presence, after his humanity should be received up into glory: (Matt. xviii. 20. xxviii. 20,) where he used the present when speaking of the future, as a farther evidence of his divine mode of existence; the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

Hence then, he came from heaven, not by change of place, but by his assumption of humanity; taking to himself a true body, and a reasonable soul, and thus becoming Immanuel, evermore uniting two distinct natures in one person; whereby he was a fit Mediator between God and man; and as our great High Priest had somewhat to offer as a sacrifice to divine justice. Thus, after honoring the precepts of that law which man had violated, he endured also the penalty which man had deserved; pouring out his soul unto death, by the shedding of his precious blood, and bearing our sins in his own body on the tree. Thus he made reconciliation for transgressors, and bore the sin of many, putting away sin by the

sacrifice of himself. Accordingly, Paul delivered it to the Corinthians, among the first principles, which he had received, "How that Christ died for our sins," according to the scriptures. On which account he is stiled, the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world; having done that really, which other sacrifices could only do typically. For, though God himself instituted sacrifices, yet it was not possible that the blood of bulls or goats could really atone for sin; inasmuch as they could not exhibit the disposition of the divine mind toward sin, as fully as the sufferings of the offenders themselves; but the death of Christ exhibited it in a still stronger and more affecting way. Thus he made him a sacrifice for sin for us, who himself knew no sin, that we might be made just, even the righteousness of God in him. Thus sin is condemned, while sinners are saved; and God is glorified in the highest, while peace is proclaimed to man. I proceed,

SECONDLY, To consider wherein consists that disposition and exercise of mind, which is here represented as necessary to a participation of the benefits of Christ's mediation.

Certainly, our Lord does not refer to a literal eating of his flesh, and drinking of his blood, according to the monstrous fiction of transubstantiation, brought into the church of Rome, about the ninth century; according to which, it is supposed, that after the words of consecration, the bread is literally turned into the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ; though it still appears like bread to the senses, and is in reality liable to become dry and mouldy, or to be eaten by the meanest animals! Hence, one Thomas Gage, who had been a Popish missionary among some Indians, was convinced of the errors of Popery, by seeing a mouse run away with the wafer, just after consecration! But a far more horrid event, shows the absurdity of this doctrine; i. e. the poisoning of Henry VII. Emperor of Germany, with the consecrated host, by his own confessor! 1313. *Blair*.

Nor does our Lord here refer to a mere sacramental eating his flesh and drinking his blood, in the Lord's supper; which was not instituted when he spake these words, and which,

though it ought not to be neglected by true believers, yet is neither essential to salvation, nor necessarily connected with it; and many will perish, who are admitted to it, even in the purest churches.

But our Lord, undoubtedly refers to that spiritual disposition, without which, no one has a right to the Lord's supper in the sight of God, and without which, no one can be benefitted by it.

Cordially believing God's testimony concerning his Son; setting, as it were, our seal to it, as worthy of all acceptance.

Fully realizing the need of his mediation, and truly entering into the import of his death; viz. that sin is exceedingly sinful. We are worthy of death: nor did it become a holy God to pass by our transgressions, without fully displaying his utter disapprobation and abhorrence of our sins. Hence, there was no remission without the shedding of blood; nor could any blood expiate our guilt, but that of God's own Son.

Sincerely relishing this whole plan of salvation, and truly coinciding in design with the Redeemer.

Entirely depending on the blood and righteousness of Christ, as sufficient for our salvation, and suited at once to pacify the conscience and purify the heart.

Continually finding, that Christ and his atonement is that to our souls, which food is to the hungry, and drink to the thirsty; not only pleasant and gratifying, but supporting and nourishing, influential and invigorating, the means of strengthening and invigorating every holy disposition, and rendering us active and unwearied in the service of God.

I am,

THIRDLY, To show what are the blessings promised and insured to those, who eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ.

He hath eternal life, and he shall live for ever. i. e. He is redeemed from death, freed from condemnation; having in Jesus Christ, redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. As no end could have been answered by the death of the sinner, but what was answered by the death of the Saviour. He that believeth not, is condemned already; the wrath of God abideth on him. But Jesus saves from the wrath to come; he has redeemed his people from the curse of

the law ; and there is now no condemnation to them that are in him. The Christian is already a partaker of a new spiritual life, which is supported by the daily exercise of faith. He has life in him. Gal. ii. 19, 20. Being vitally united to Christ, the love of Christ constrains him to live unto God. While he relies on Christ for pardon, he depends on him also for strength, and for the discharge of every duty : feeling his obligation to be wholly the Lord's ; and to live, not to himself, but to him that died and rose again.

He dwelleth in me, and I in him. 1 John iv. 16. He is in Christ and Christ in him. He looks to Christ. Christ watches over him. Christ dwells in his heart by faith, is in him the hope of glory ; indicating, that he as truly lives by Christ (though not as perfectly) as Christ in his state of humiliation, lived by the Father ; constantly trusting in him, delighting in him, regarding his glory : as Paul said, " For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." He is certainly an heir of eternal life ; for him, the Forerunner has taken possession of heavenly mansions. As soon as absent from the body, he shall be present with the Lord. Where I am, there shall my servant be, to behold my glory.

I will raise him up at the last day. Ver. 39, 40. 44. 54. How often does Jesus claim this ! " I am the resurrection, and the life : he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

But if we are strangers to this mental feeding on Christ, we have no spiritual life in us : we are dead in sin, and exposed to eternal death. He that does not relish the gospel is alienated from the life of God. He that loves not the Redeemer is accursed.

LXXV.

CHRIST THE ONLY SOURCE OF ETERNAL HAPPINESS.

JOHN vi. 68.

Lord, to whom shall we go ? thou hast the words of eternal life.

It seems to me, that in this day of avowed infidelity, this reply of Peter to our Lord's question, when, upon the

apostacy of some, he asked the twelve—"Will ye also go away?" may be considered with advantage, by all who feel themselves assailed with any temptation to slacken their regard to genuine Christianity.

We may consider the words as containing a striking question, and a strong assertion. We will begin with the former, as calculated to show the folly of giving up Christianity, even if its evidences were weaker than they are, and the importance of examining its claims; and then ascend to the latter, and maintain that no desirable evidence is wanting in its favor.

FIRST: A striking question: *Lord, to whom shall we go?*

Before a man renounces Christianity, let him be assured he has found a better religion, or else be assured that irreligion is better than any religion. But if a man wish to know God, know his duty, know his destiny, to obtain the pardon of sin, the sanctification of his nature, the hope of eternal life, to whom shall he go?

Shall he go to modern Judaism? The Jews professed to be the peculiar people of God. Peter was a Jew by birth, and had been strongly attached to the leaders of that church; though now he had become a follower of Jesus of Nazareth, whom they rejected. The chief temptations to which he and his brethren were exposed were from this source. But they had then little weight, and they have now still less. The Jewish doctors were evidently prejudiced against Jesus. His doctrine was too pure and humiliating for them. But it corresponded with the Old-testament prophecies, and they could bring no proof against Jesus from the scriptures. The time was expired, or very nearly, and if Jesus were not the Messiah, none of them could tell him where or when to look for another. This argument is stronger now, since the death and resurrection of Christ, and success of his gospel; and the destruction of Jerusalem, and consequent calamities on the Jewish nation, above two hundred years more than the time they were in Canaan; or, allowing for the Babylonish captivity, near three hundred years longer. If Jesus be not the Messiah, it is vain to hope for the prophecies of the Old Testament ever to be accomplished.

Shall he go to Mahomet? Will any one pretend that his religion is more credible than the religion of Jesus? That it was spread in a manner more worthy of God; is of a more pure and benign tendency; reveals a more perfect standard of duty, or a more sure way to a more glorious heaven?

The revolution he effected was not near so great, nor of so good a tendency; nor did it prevail against such obstacles; it was not confirmed by miracles; and what tales some of the commentators have related are highly ridiculous. He accommodated himself to men's lusts. His religion first spread in a dark age, and has prevailed among the most ignorant nations. It neither tends to glorify God, nor to promote goodwill to men; but encourages war and despotism. He admitted the mission and miracles of Christ; but if Christianity be true, Mahometanism is false; and if Christianity is false, so is Mahometanism too.

Shall he go to modern paganism? In which of the pagan nations that now exist, can a religion be found preferable or comparable to the religion of Jesus? Will he, with the Africans, worship the tiger and the shark, as king of land and of sea? Will he adopt the human sacrifices of the South Seas? or the various modes of self-torture among the Hindoos?

Shall he go to ancient paganism? And attempt to revive the worship of adulterous Jupiter, and his jealous and revengeful consort; of thievish Mercury; of the lustful Venus, and savage Mars, &c.? Or, attempting to separate the fables of the poets from the writings of the philosophers, who never made any complete reformation themselves, will he hope to learn a purer morality from them than from the scriptures? or more consistent views of a future state, and the way in which a sinner may be entitled to eternal bliss, and prepared for it? Varro says, the philosophers had two hundred and eighty-eight opinions concerning the chief good! Then whom shall we follow?

Shall a man go to deism, in preference to Christianity? What can modern unbelievers of Christianity do for him? Are they agreed among themselves? By no means. Some deny a moral government and the immortality of the soul;

and consequently approach very near to Atheism. And those who admit both, what information can they give as to the standard of duty, the way of forgiveness, or preparation for future bliss? Will you then prefer the deists? or, to make thorough work of it,

Will you take refuge in atheism itself? Now you get rid of a moral governor, but what do you gain? If there is not any being to inspect you, neither is there any one to protect you. If there be none to control your conduct, there is none to console you in trouble. If there is no hell to dread, there is no heaven to hope for. You must shift for yourself in life, and die like a dog at last. But Peter follows his striking question with,

SECONDLY, A strong assertion.—*Thou hast the words of eternal life.*

Peter had nothing to awe him or to allure him to make this acknowledgment, from the fear of temporal penalties, or hope of worldly advantages. It was the dictate of cordial conviction; and though he once denied his Lord in the hour of temptation, he soon recovered, and his attachment remained firm till he sealed his testimony with his blood. And thousands have done the same. Yea, millions besides the martyrs have been influenced by this confidence through life, and transported by it in the very pains of death. To whom but Jesus can we go for a satisfactory account of the the divine nature, the origin of the world, the first and present state of man, the rule of duty, the clear revelation of a future state, a title to future happiness, meetness for eternal life, assurance of obtaining it? On these latter subjects we will enlarge, and show Peter's ground for his assertion.

Well might he say to Jesus, *Thou hast the words of eternal life.* Thou hast fully *revealed* eternal life. Jesus came from heaven, and he assures us there is a heaven. Heathens could guess but little. Even Jews had very partial discoveries. Christ has brought life and immortality to light by his gospel. Thou hast *procured* eternal life. Hast rendered it perfectly consistent with all the divine perfections for eternal life to be bestowed upon sinners. Though the

wages of sin is death, yet, eternal life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Thus God can be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly. Sin is completely pardoned, and yet utterly condemned, and completely discountenanced.

Thou Lord hast *promised* eternal life to every one who believes, and cordially falls in with thy plan of redemption. He will in nowise cast out any that come unto God by him. And well may we believe his invitations and promises!

Thou, Lord, art so *dignified*, being the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and full of truth. He is Immanuel, God manifest in the flesh. The brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person.

Thou art so *authorized*, having come on this kind errand with thy Father's perfect concurrence, being sent and sealed by him; attested by him.

Thou hast *done* and *suffered* so much to procure eternal life for sinners; hast perfectly fulfilled the law, and become obedient unto death; hast shown supreme love to God, and such disinterested love to man, at one time, and in the same act, in laying down thy life for thy sheep.

Thou art so *gracious* and so *faithful*. The chief of sinners need not hesitate at returning to God in his name; he will receive them, and will keep them to the last day.

Thou hast taken possession of heaven for us. Thou art appointed to judge the world at last. How safely may we depend on such a Saviour!

His words have been *proved* to be the words of eternal life, by the strongest evidence. By their effect on the conscience, filling it with peace, producing purity of heart, holiness of life, peace in death.

Without knowing the words of eternal life, how can any man enjoy even present happiness? Worldly riches, honors, pleasures, cannot give it. And surely any one would look in vain to his own righteousness; in vain to any other mediator! O come, as a lost sinner to Jesus; for he, and he alone, has the words of eternal life.

LXXVI.

DEPRAVITY THE CAUSE OF SPIRITUAL IGNORANCE.

JOHN viii. 43.

Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.

WE are assured, that even they who were sent to apprehend the blessed Jesus, avowed, when they returned to their employers, that never man spake as he spake; and yet multitudes heard him in vain! Heard him and disregarded him, misunderstood him, murmured at him, and rejected him and his doctrine! Where then did the fault lie? Not in him, but in them, you will all allow. And though the best preachers of his gospel will not affirm that they are thus free from all fault or defect; yet, wherever the same truths are faithfully declared, those who reject them will be found to have been influenced chiefly by the like causes which induced the hearers of the Saviour to reject him.

The truth does not suit the carnal heart. Hence the opposition made to both law and gospel: the former indeed, is alarming, the latter encouraging. But they that disregard the former are seldom influenced by mere dread; they do not often realize the truth enough to produce it: and when we come to exhibit the latter, its humiliating import is nearly as disgusting as the terrors of the law; nor is its suitableness to our condition sufficient to reconcile the unrenewed heart to admit it sincerely and without reserve. An evil heart is the great source of infidelity, and an unwillingness to return to God causes sinners to reject the Saviour, who would restore them both to the divine favor, and the divine image; who would secure them from condemnation, but bring them back to voluntary subjection. "Mercy becomes as offensive as justice, when offered on such terms as contradict the reigning unholiness of the soul. We learn,

FIRST, There are many, who, though they enjoy the best means of instruction, yet do not understand the language and doctrine of Christ.

They do not understand what he has spoken respecting the extensive claims of the divine law. On this our Lord

insisted most expressly. Matt. xxii. 37—40. Justifying its demands of the whole heart for God, and its requiring disinterested love to mankind. But most men think it enough to abstain from profaneness, or to comply with external worship, without much sensible gratitude, and without any cordial esteem for God's moral character, delight in him, zeal for his glory, or devotedness to his service. And as to their fellow-men, if they do not injure others, if they love those who love them, are kind to a little circle around them, and yield to the impulse of sympathy when objects of distress fall immediately under their notice, they think this enough. Not so our Lord. Luke x. 29—37. Matt. v. 44—48.

They do not understand what he has said of the great evil of sin. Being blind to the glory of God, they see not the greatness of their obligations, nor the evil of violating them. They condemn gross immoralities, and are sensible enough of injuries offered by others to themselves, or of their neglect of duty towards them. But the evil of their own sins, of sin as it is against God, of heart sins, they do not understand; especially not so as to admit that every transgression, deviation, or defect, deserves the divine displeasure; that the wages of sin is death; and that they are justly liable to the curse of the divine law, and exposed to everlasting punishment.

They do not understand what our Lord has said respecting the impossibility of a sinner's justifying himself. He taught, that nothing short of perfect obedience can satisfy the requirements of the law; nor can any suffering, less than the full penalty, compensate for transgression. Repentance itself, even if sincere, can do nothing towards it. They that trust in their own righteousness are blinded by pride, and are some of the farthest from the kingdom of God.

They do not understand what he has said of the need of his atonement. He himself said that he came to seek and save the lost, to give himself a ransom for many. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." John the Baptist pointed to him as the "Lamb of God, who taketh

away the sin of the world." He affirmed, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." "I am the good Shepherd, the good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." "I am that bread of life." "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." "God so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him may not perish, but have everlasting life." Many said this was a hard saying, and murmured at it.

They do not understand what he said of the necessity of the new birth. John iii. 3—7. They are not aware how entirely man is perverted and depraved, and consequently see not the need of his being converted and renewed. Reformation may be needful for some, but they will not admit that regeneration is needful for all. They know not how far man is from God, and how averse to return. And therefore understand not.

They understand not his doctrine of the sovereignty of divine grace. Nothing gave more violent offence to the Jews than this doctrine. Luke iv. 25—28. Yet if sinners are so guilty, that nothing but an atonement of infinite value could render their salvation consistent with the divine honor; and are so depraved, that nothing but Almighty grace can induce them to obey the most righteous commands, or comply with the kindest invitations, or make them willing to repent and embrace the gospel; surely God has a right to be gracious to whom he will.

They understand not his speech concerning the necessity of self-denial and bearing the cross. To cease from their own wisdom; not to lean to their own understandings; but, renouncing all pre-conceived prejudices, sit down at his feet; to abjure all self-righteousness, and glory only in the cross; to deny self-will, and distrust our own strength; bowing to Christ's yoke, fighting under his banner; to own him as Prophet, Priest, and King, and encounter all opposition for his sake;—all this seems a hard requisition.

They understand not the tendency of the doctrine of grace to promote holiness. That through the law, we are dead

to the law, and yet live to God; that we renounce self-righteousness, and yet yield new obedience; that we are crucified with Christ, and yet live; and feel the love of Christ constrain us. All this surpasses their comprehension.

They understand not what he has said of the nature of heavenly happiness. Not sensual, not selfish, all pure and holy. To see God, enjoy God, be conformed to him, serve him. All delight in each other's happiness, as if it were their own.

We learn,
SECONDLY, That the reason why men do not understand the language of Christ, is because their sinful disposition lays them under a moral inability to hearken to his words. No obscurity or indecision in the divine Teacher, nor want of sufficient plainness and clearness in his words, is the cause. Nor were the hearers destitute of mental powers, &c.

But,
One who has no holy bias, no divine taste, cannot tell how to admit the justice of the divine claims and requirements; the truth of the divine charges; or the need and glory of the divine plan of reconciliation.

He cannot bear to admit that all his idols are worthless, compared with the living and true God, the great source of being and blessedness. Or that he is infinitely to blame for disregarding the divine glory, and disobeying the divine will.

He that is under the dominion of sinful selfishness, cannot bear to be required to treat every possible subject of the divine goodness, as if his happiness was of as much value as his own.

He that is under the dominion of sin cannot bear to hear that he is justly condemned, and is unable to make any compensation for his transgressions; or that sin is infinitely odious to God, and deserves his wrath and curse, and that all his best works are defective, and deeply contaminated with sin.

He who is unwilling to admit that he himself is worthy of death, cannot perceive any need of Christ's dying for him; he cannot see the necessity or propriety of Christ's mediation; or of salvation through a surety and a sacrifice of

infinite value. No one who supposes that his own punishment would have been an impeachment of divine goodness, if not of divine justice, can see the wisdom, goodness, or glory of God displayed in Christ's suffering for sin. If he should pretend to admit the gospel to be true, it is only under a false view of it; as if Christ had rather made an atonement to us for the rigor of the divine law, than offered an atonement to God for the evil of our violating it; or as if, instead of being requisite to justify God from all suspicion of favoring iniquity in our pardon, it had been necessary to justify him from all charge of cruelty in the original covenant with Adam, or at least in demanding perfect obedience of us since the fall; or as if, instead of being intended to magnify a perfectly just law, too good to be abated, much less to be abrogated, it were designed to procure the mitigation of a hard law, too rigorous to be enforced.

Now, if the former view be admitted, salvation must be a wonderful display of sovereign grace. The providing a Saviour was optional and spontaneous; and the influence of the Spirit, to draw us to Christ, must be equally so. But human pride does not like to hear this; it cannot bear to admit this fact.

The heart which is engrossed by worldly objects, will disregard invisible realities, and cannot bear to hear of the necessity of forsaking all for Christ, becoming a stranger and a pilgrim, and setting the affections on things above; waiting for the rest that remains for the people of God; looking forward to a state of perfect purity and felicity, where no one will desire to be exalted at the expense of another, but each will rejoice to see millions as holy and happy as himself; and where God shall be all in all.

LXXVII.

JESUS AT THE GRAVE OF LAZARUS.

JOHN xi. 35.

Jesus wept.

THIS chapter contains the history of one of the most remarkable miracles wrought by our blessed Lord, viz. The

resurrection of Lazarus after he had been dead four days. The whole is related in the most simple manner, and (like the whole narrative of our Lord's life and death,) without a word of encomium on Jesus, or of invective against his adversaries; but yet in such a manner as to indicate his essential dignity, and his calm and unassuming consciousness of it: while his knowledge of what passed at a distance, his intentional delay, his discourse with his disciples, and afterwards with the sisters of the deceased, and the authoritative mode in which he performed the miracle, all indicate his unspeakable superiority to Moses and all the prophets.

Yet here we read that *Jesus wept*. Yes, it was foretold of him that he should be a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and how plainly does he answer to the description! But let us inquire,

FIRST, Why did he weep?

Certainly it was not because he was surprised to find Lazarus dead; for he had intimated that event to his disciples at a distance, and purposely delayed coming to Bethany till after his dissolution and interment.

Nor yet because he had any doubt of his own ability to raise him from the dead, of which he not only assured his sister, but his disciples before he came.

But Jesus wept partly through sympathy with the relatives and friends of the deceased. Though he knew their sorrow would soon be turned into joy, yet he felt for their present distress, and willingly gave way to the tender feelings of humanity. He troubled himself, and wept.

I suppose also he indulged the sensations resulting from a deep reflection on the numberless natural evils which sin has brought on mankind, and from which he does not see fit to exempt even the objects of his special love.

And also on account of the more awful effects of sin on the human mind, blinding the understanding through hardening the heart. So we read elsewhere of his being grieved for the hardness of their hearts. Mark iii. 5. And at this time some of the Jews cavilled at him; and he knew that

others, instead of being convinced by the subsequent miracle, would take counsel to slay both himself and Lazarus, after he had raised him from the dead.

We read elsewhere, (Luke xix. 41.) of his weeping over the city, as foreseeing the miseries they would bring on themselves, by their rejection of his gospel; and the same foresight affected his heart, even as he was led forth to his own crucifixion.

SECONDLY: What may we learn from his weeping?

That he was really and truly man, and possessed of all the sinless affections of human nature. The opposers of our Lord's divinity seem to themselves to have done a great thing, when they have adduced evidence that he was a man; as if we did not readily admit, or rather earnestly contend for, the same. We maintain that he was man, and yet more than man: man he must be, that he might have something to offer; and a divine person, that his offering might avail for us. It was needful he should be man, that he might have a life that he could lay down; but he must be more than a man, that he might take it up again: had he been a mere man, his coming into the world could not have been optional on his part; nor could he have had any more hand in his own resurrection, than Lazarus had in his. See John x. 17, 18.

We learn, that he was full of tenderness and compassion. We have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He hungered, he thirsted, he was weary, he was troubled, he wept, he suffered, he bled, he died. And though now he can suffer and weep no more, yet he is as ready to relieve us as if he were still liable to bodily uneasiness. He has the same kind disposition, although it does not so affect his glorified body, as it once affected his corporeal frame, in his state of humiliation.

We learn, that we may expect to weep in this world. Here Jesus groaned and wept, yea, bled and died; and surely it is sufficient for the servant to be as his Lord. Blessed are ye that mourn now, for you shall be comforted, and enter at length into the joy of your Lord.

We learn, that moderate sorrow, under the pressure of

natural evil, is allowable. Our Lord does not require us to extirpate natural affection, but to moderate it; he does not utterly suppress the feelings of the heart, but sanctifies them. Afflictions themselves are not joyous, but grievous. Now, for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness, through manifold trials. But the trial of your faith is more precious than that of gold. Yet let them that weep, be as though they wept not, knowing that the time is short, and that God is all-sufficient, and will never fail, nor forsake his people.

We learn, that deep sorrow on account of *moral* evil is our duty. Ps cxix. 136. 158. cxxxix. 21. True saints will sigh and cry for the abominations of the land in which they dwell: Ezek. ix. 4. And for the enmity men show to the cross of Christ. Phil. iii. 18.

How much more should we weep on account of our own sins; even when we have reason to believe they are forgiven! When Peter thought of his denying his Lord, he wept. He did not make light of it, either because Christ had foretold it, or because he had been forgiven. He did not say, 'It was to be so—never mind!'

Ah! if the blessed Jesus were now upon earth, or were present in human nature, to observe all the deportment of some who profess his name, would not their misconduct be ready to make him weep? If he beheld all our ingratitude, inconstancy, and inconsistency, would he not weep? or our lukewarmness, our carelessness, our pride, our worldly-mindedness? And if these things would make him weep, should they not make us weep? True, he cannot weep now; that would be incompatible with his present state of exaltation: but he sees them with disapprobation; and as many as he loves he will rebuke and chasten. And these are the very things for which he bled and died. He shed his precious blood to atone, not only for your sins before conversion, but also for sins committed after conversion; which could not be pardoned at a cheaper rate.

Oh my brethren! to make light of sin, now his sufferings are finished, is as vile as it would be if those sufferings were yet future, and you made light of adding to them. Ah!

would you then say, 'I do not mind driving a few more thorns into his temples ; I do not mind if the plowers make longer furrows in his back ; I do not mind their defiling his blessed face with shameful spitting ! I would do the same myself if I could !' Is not this the vile import of sin ? What else occasioned all the pains of his body, and all the sorrows of his holy soul ? All were the just expressions of God's abhorrence of your sin. And will you not hate what God so hated, as that he could not pardon one transgression without thus bruising his own Son ! Oh, look at your gracious substitute in Gethsemane and Golgotha, and mourn. He wept, he bled, to save you from weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, in endless despair ; but he did not weep to save you from the salutary sorrow of genuine repentance. He is exalted to give repentance, as well as remission of sins. Surely that which made the blessed Jesus not only weep, but bleed and die ; that which required that his soul should be made an offering for sin ; should cause you to weep and mourn as long as it has any existence in you.

We should learn to sympathize readily with others ; to rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep. So did Paul. How tender a spirit did he show ! Acts xxi. 13. 2 Cor. ii. 4. vii. 6—8. Phil. ii. 27. He never abused the doctrine of the decrees, to excuse a neglect of means, or a want of feeling.

We learn, how we should pity miserable sinners. So Jesus wept over Jerusalem, and exclaimed, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not !" In the exercise of his ministry, he acted no otherwise than as we should do. And Paul plainly followed his Lord's example. He prayed and preached, as making, not the secret purposes of God his rule, but Christ's commission. Col. i. 28. Even in a civil court he wished the whole assembly to be as he was. Acts xxvi. 20. And such was his heart's desire for the salvation of the Jews, that he even wished himself accursed, after the manner of Christ, for their sake. Rom. ix. 2, 3. x. 1.

LXXVIII.

PROGRESSIVE ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE DIVINE CONDUCT.

JOHN xiii. 7.

Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now ; but thou shalt know hereafter.

THIS declaration of our Lord immediately respects a particular circumstance of his gracious conduct towards his apostles, which took place the very evening before his last sufferings ; when, in order to show his love to his disciples, and to set them an affecting example of mutual love and benevolence, He who knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto his Father ; and that all things were given into his hands, “riseth from supper, laid aside his garments ; and took a towel and girded himself. After that, he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash his disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.” To this wonderful and instructive instance of humility and love, Peter inconsiderately and peremptorily objected. This transaction was also intended as an emblem of that more spiritual cleansing by the grace of Christ, which we daily need.

Our Lord suggests that he would more fully explain his conduct by and by, and that it would be the truest modesty to yield implicitly to his wisdom and will. But Peter rashly repeats his refusal with still greater vehemence, and yet is soon convinced of his folly, and glad to submit to his Lord’s authority and grace.

This example is truly instructive, and should lead us to guard against frowardness, false humility, and self-will. And our Lord’s declaration, instead of being confined to Peter, will be found applicable, in a variety of instances, to other sincere believers.

FIRST : Christ’s own disciples, after that character justly belongs to them, may, for a while, be ignorant of the meaning and design of some parts of his conduct.

Some, at their first conversion, and for a considerable time afterward, may have but a very imperfect knowledge of the

doctrines of the gospel. How obscure the views of the apostles were, before the death of Christ took place, of the approach and designs of that important event : though so much instruction had been given in the Old-testament types and prophecies ; and though our Lord himself so often, and expressly alluded to it ! I consider this, indeed, as partly owing to the degenerate state of the Jewish church, and the corrupt ideas of the nature of the Messiah's kingdom which then prevailed among them, contrary to the faith of more ancient believers. And I conceive their ignorance of Christ's death and its glorious design, to be widely different from a denial of the atonement now, since that event has really taken place, and the doctrine is more clearly stated in the apostolic writings. Yet the dulness of their apprehensions on this head was really surprising, and this cause doubtless tended to make Peter more backward to understand his Lord.

Yet this example may convince us that there may be some grace, when there is great defect in doctrinal knowledge.

I may observe, moreover, That our views of our own *defects*, necessities, pollutions, and dangers are often very imperfect at first conversion. So it was with Peter, and therefore he was less ready to understand his master. But Peter knew afterwards, his need of daily cleansing ; and so shall we, as we grow in grace and in acquaintance with our own hearts, and the spirituality of the divine law.

It is true, believers are at once justified, and at once renewed. But, though the former act admits of no increase, yet they need the daily application of the blood of Christ, to keep up a lively sense of pardon on their souls ; and the work of sanctification is gradual, and needs carrying on daily. This seems to be taught expressly in ver. 10, which is more exactly rendered by Dr. Campbell, " He who hath been bathing, needeth only to wash his feet," and the Dr. observes, " It is an evident allusion to the ancient eastern custom, of bathing before they went to a feast, and afterwards washing their feet when they came in."

Our ideas of our own *duty* are often very defective, and pre-

vent our understanding those things by which the Lord would instruct us therein. Peter learned more humility, and more of the necessity of self-diffidence, and of condescension, after this. Then he better understood the lesson his Lord taught him on this occasion. Then he durst not pretend that he loved Christ more than his brethren did; and he exhorted others to be clothed with humility. I may add with propriety,

Our views of *divine providence* are often very contracted, and we are frequently ready to wonder at events, or to complain of some which we see at length to have been ordered wisely, and to be very beneficial. So it was with all the disciples soon after this transaction, respecting that most important event of Christ's death. They spoke of it when it first took place, as if it had been the ruin of all their hopes; but how did they afterward rejoice therein, as the price of their redemption!

SECONDLY: What is now most mysterious and hidden, respecting the Lord's conduct towards his people, will at length be made apparent to their full satisfaction.

Many things will be cleared up to us by an increase of spiritual illumination. Let us therefore pray daily for more light, and for deliverance from sinful prejudice, endeavoring to study God's word impartially.

Other things will be illustrated by attending to the sequel of divine providence. God's way is often in the deep, and his footsteps unknown; while we are too apt to be hasty in our judgments. But, "better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit." Eccl. vii. 8. We judge as by seeing the wrong side of a piece of tapestry.

Much may be learned by observation of events which take place around us, and histories recorded in the Holy Scriptures. How often does the prosperity of fools destroy them, while the afflictions of the righteous do them good. How did Jacob conceive all to be *against* him, when in fact, all was in a wonderful manner working *for* him. How did Job curse the day of his birth; when, nevertheless, his greatest prosperity was before him.

Present afflictions often incapacitate us for a while, from forming a distinct judgment of God's design in them : like a trembling hand holding a telescope, to view distant objects. But they will be perceived better by and by. We perceive the inconvenience and pain of present circumstances, but do we know the more dangerous snares of a contrary situation ? How much worse might we have fallen by a different sort of temptation !

What is not cleared up on earth, will be seen to our full satisfaction by the light of glory. There will be no night there ; no gloom, no obscurity ; but perfect, unclouded, uninterrupted day.

Yes, if we are Christians, who love the truth, *what we know not now we shall know hereafter*. At present we know but in part ; but we should expect and desire to increase in our knowledge of divine truth, and search after it impartially and earnestly. When young Christians begin to attain a little doctrinal knowledge, they are too ready to be dogmatical and fierce in their zeal for opinions, and require all to agree with them in every punctilio ; but the best Christians expect to be learners all their days, and bear with others as Christ bore with them. Yet, on the other hand, we should guard also against a sceptical spirit.

In order to our understanding the mysteries of *providence*, let us particularly consider God's end in all that befalls his people, and endeavor to unite with him therein. This would solve many difficulties ; as it would with regard to God's conduct towards Israel. Had he meant merely to humor and gratify them, he would have taken a different method. But he meant to glorify his name, and form a people for himself, to show forth his praise. To prove and humble them, and rectify them. So, why does God bereave us, or disappoint us, or try us, but to keep us from idols, to induce us to seek rest in himself, wean us from the world, and prepare us for heaven ? And to make to himself a glorious name, by supplying, supporting, and delivering ? We know not what is good for us, of all before us in this vain life.

In heaven, all error will be done away for ever. All darkness will vanish, all prejudice be removed. We shall

make the most rapid progress in knowledge, holiness, and joy. Then shall we see that all God's conduct was wise and right, both as to the management of our own minute concerns, and as to the regulation of the vast affairs of the universe.

LXXIX.

MUTUAL LOVE A MARK OF CHRIST'S DISCIPLES.

JOHN xiii. 35.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

OUR blessed Lord, in his last conversation with his beloved disciples, when he was just about to leave them, and go to the Father, inculcated upon them, in a special manner, the duty of brotherly love.

The Evangelist, who so fully recorded these farewell discourses, and was admitted to a peculiar intimacy with his Master; who leaned on his bosom, and imbibed so much of his spirit, dwells largely on this subject in his Epistles, especially in the longest of them.

Our Lord calls this a new commandment, as a duty about to be enforced by new motives, and as he was setting up a new dispensation, in which this grace would be called into more extensive and distinguished exercise.

Under the Jewish dispensation, the chief attachment of good men, was nearly confined to their own countrymen, because hardly any worshippers of the true God were to be found, except of the land of Israel; and though they were taught, that God ultimately intended to bless all the families of the earth in the seed of Abraham, yet, they were not encouraged to expect that others would be brought to know and serve the Lord, till the advent of the Messiah. Then there would be more encouragement to active benevolence and philanthropy, and reason for a special complacency in all that should be actually gathered to Shiloh. And relation to Christ would be a closer bond of union, than relation to Abraham had been; and his image in regenerate souls, would be a proper ground of complacency.

It is the dignity of man to be capable of extensive union, and of diffusive benevolence; and the avowed design of God, to spread his gospel universally, encourages its noblest exertions. But the text leads us to consider our special duty towards them that already know the Lord. We will therefore notice,

FIRST, The distinguishing nature and special objects of the love here inculcated.

Our Lord is not here speaking of that sincere benevolence, which should extend to all mankind, including our personal enemies, and those who may be at present enemies to God. This he strongly inculcates elsewhere. The law of God requires it, the gospel promotes it, and true saints possess it.

But the text relates to a higher kind of love, which we must admit is more confined in its objects. It includes complacency, and is restricted to those who are the true disciples and brethren of Christ.

It is grounded upon their relation to Christ, and their resemblance of him: and consequently, it originates in love to him, and testifies the sincerity and strength of it. John, in his second Epistle, describes it, as belonging to all who have known the truth, and as having respect to the *truth* which dwells in the objects of it.

Yet it does not spring from mere attachment to speculative opinions, or a blind adherence to external forms. While Christians own Christ as their teacher, they regard him in a still higher and more endearing character as their Saviour and King. The truths he has taught, are of the most affecting and most practical kind; nor can they be cordially embraced without powerfully influencing the heart and the life.

If the *import* of the gospel be understood, we must be humble; and as only by pride cometh contention, this must do much to prevent discord, arrogance, and every hateful passion. Shall they who know that they were worthy of death, but who have obtained pardon through a Mediator, quarrel with their fellow-criminals; especially with those who have accepted and pleaded the same act of grace with themselves, and are now interested in the same free favor and pardoning

mercy? Shall they not be attached to one another, as well as to their Redeemer? or can they rightly regard him, and feel no regard to each other?

If we understand the *nature* of the gospel, we must love one another. The religion of Christ is the religion of love. In the gospel is the most wonderful display of divine love. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Christ loved his church, and gave himself for it. Surely then, his love must constrain us to love those, who are evidently loved by him. 1 John iii. 16.

If we enter into the *design* of the gospel, we must love one another; being alike taught to depart from iniquity, and to be separate from the world; being alike exposed to the world's hatred; having the same rule to guide us, the same object of pursuit, and the same expectations of future happiness.

Now this love should extend to all who are of "the true circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." "As many as walk by this rule, peace be upon them, and upon the Israel of God." It is not founded on expectation of temporal advantage, personal benefit, or party connexion; but on that relation to Christ, which is manifested by faith, works by love, and produces studious conformity to him. It extends to all such, as far as we are convinced they are of this description, whether they follow with us or not, or are of our society, denomination, or country; notwithstanding difference of sentiment on other subjects or even on the inferior parts of religion.

SECONDLY: The ways in which we should discover this love to the true disciples of Christ.

Own and acknowledge as such, all that can make good their claim to this distinguishing character. We are not bound to believe every pretender; but should judge candidly and impartially, according to our Lord's own rule. "By their fruits ye shall know them." Beware of false candor. Holy love "rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the

truth. Beware of real censoriousness. Do not unchristian a man for every mistake, or imperfection; and especially not for disagreeing with you in some matter of doubtful disputation, or human invention. No, nor let a fault weigh a vast deal more in one of another denomination, than you would allow it to do in one of your own sect.

Unite with the disciples of Christ, in avowing your entire dependance on him; your love to his gospel; regard to his authority; conformity to his will. On points wherein true Christians may differ from each other, search the Sacred Scriptures for yourself. Unite more closely with those that you really think nearest the standard; but let nothing prevent your showing a sincere affection to all who hold the head.

It would not be conforming to Christ's command, to admit privately the principal truths of the gospel, and yet be ashamed to avow them; or own his commands, and yet not practise them. To wish to stand fair with a few select professors, who may be most reputable in the world; but to be unwilling to join any body of Christians, because the majority are poor and despised, and some inconsistencies found among them,—would be to act a very different part from Moses. Heb. xi. 25. Let it appear that the evidence of real conformity to Christ, recommends to your esteem, all who belong to Christ, for his sake.

Never lay more stress on things in which men may agree with you without regeneration, than on those which indicate regeneration. You are not bound to approve of every thing in true Christians. Mourn over their defects, but delight in their graces. Though not blind to their faults, do not exaggerate, nor needlessly expose them. Let all your intercourse be regulated by love. Mingle tenderness and faithfulness in your reproofs.

Show that you value their company. Let such be your chosen associates. All cannot, in this world, enjoy the society of many; but show you do not despise any, with whom you may reasonably expect to live for ever. Show that your heart is set on the advancement of Christ's cause; that you rejoice to hear of its success, and to subserve it. Rejoice in

the prosperity of others; sympathize with their afflictions; readily relieve, if it be in your power.

Study things which make for peace, and whereby one may edify another. Lay out yourself for the good of your fellow-christians, by word and deed. Exercise self-denial, forbearance, forgiveness. Set an edifying example.

THIRDLY: The motives which should excite us to attend to this duty.

Our Lord's authority; the peculiar stress he laid upon it, as his dying charge. His own example; the desire of resembling and honoring him; the hope of his approbation. "Ye did it unto ME."

You were loved with the same love; bought with the like price. You are partakers of the same new nature; are engaged in the same cause; have the same enemies; the same privileges; and are going to one home!

While your love extends to *all*, let it have full employ in the particular society to which you have voluntarily connected yourself; and show it, especially to those with whom you are called to the greatest intercourse.

LXXX.

THE NATURE AND EVIDENCES OF DIVINE MANIFESTATIONS.

JOHN xiv. 22.

Judas saith unto him, (not Iscariot,) Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?

THESE words of the apostle Jude, may be considered as either the language of *inquiry* or of *admiration*; or probably of both. He wondered at the condescension of our Lord, in the promise, (ver. 21.) though he did not already understand how it should be fulfilled, and begged some further explanation. As all who truly love Christ, are equally concerned in the subject, it must be highly worthy of our attention and careful investigation, being very wonderful and affecting.

Let us accordingly endeavor to examine, *the nature and evidences of divine manifestations.*

FIRST : The nature of divine manifestations.

Let us inquire, What is it for Christ to manifest himself unto us, as he does not unto the world ? We observe, NEGATIVELY,

First, A spiritual manifestation of Christ is here intended, and not merely an acquaintance with our Lord's humanity on earth. Judas Iscariot had the latter equally with the eleven. But the privilege in the text is common to saints in all ages.

Secondly : It implies much more than the manifestation of his natural perfections in the works of creation and providence.

Thirdly : It is more than the discovery he has made of himself to all under the sound of the gospel, by the bare letter of the word. It is not a speculative acquaintance, without an answerable frame of heart.

Fourthly : It is not any merely rational operation of his power or spirit upon the natural conscience of men in general. What some call *the light within*, is not this manifestation of Christ.

Fifthly : It is far from consisting in any *imaginary* appearance, or fanciful view of Christ's human nature now, as if on the cross, or surrounded with a kind of glory.

Sixthly : It does not chiefly consist in a discovery of personal interest in his benefits, or the manifestation of his love to an individual.

CONCESSION.—*First* : Every spiritual manifestation of Christ will produce an earnest desire of interest in him, and appropriation of him.

Secondly : Spiritual manifestations are often attended with a high degree of assurance of interest in him.

Thirdly : All spiritual manifestations afford some evidence, that those who enjoy them are interested in Christ Jesus.

Yet the following ASSERTIONS appear well founded :—

First : A mere persuasion of interest, (without any spiritual manifestation accompanying it,) has nothing gracious in it.

Secondly : Some true Christians may possibly retain some persuasion of interest in Christ, when grace is very little in

exercise, though they have at *that* time, no remarkable or fresh manifestations of Christ to their souls. But real Christians cannot be satisfied in such a frame, much less willing to abide in it.

Thirdly: Many of the worst of hypocrites may have a strong confidence of their being in a happy state, favorites of God, (John viii. 41.) and interested in Christ; though they never had any spiritual manifestations.

Fourthly: Christ has truly manifested himself to many, who yet, through doctrinal ignorance, temptation, &c. have not yet been assured of their interest in him. Nevertheless, they have seen his glory, as of the only-begotten of the Father; admired him; panted after him; resolved to die at his feet; would not willingly offend him in any thing; loved him for his own excellence, and for his goodness, and wonderful grace in saving others.

Fifthly: Some, under very great manifestations of Christ to their souls, (though assured of interest,) have been raised above the consideration of their own safe state. Their sweetest, most spiritual, and refined joys have arisen from somewhat higher than any selfish considerations. They have at such times, as it were, forgot themselves, and could not bear to withdraw their eyes from Christ's own glory, to consider themselves, or dwell on their own safety.

Sixthly: For Christ to manifest himself unto us, as he does not unto the world, is for him so to enlighten the mind by his Spirit, as that the spiritual beauty, excellence, and glory of Christ, as displayed in the written word, shall be realized, and make an answerable impression on the heart: even the glory of his divine perfections, power, mediatorial offices, vicarious obedience and death, is so manifested as to produce a heartfelt sense of his excellence, loveliness, and worthiness; and the wonderful glory and love of the whole trinity, as displayed in his mediatorial work. 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10. 12. 2 Cor. iii. 17, 18. iv. 6.

So then, this manifestation of Christ to the soul, is not by the discovery of new truths concerning him, not before contained in his word; but by impressing the heart with a lively sense of the excellence of discoveries already made in the

Sacred Scriptures, the foundation for which was laid by regenerating grace ; and which inward sense of the Saviour's excellence and glory is revived, and increased from time to time, by the influence of the Holy Spirit on the soul.

Nothing can be more free and undeserved than this divine influence ; but it will be best known if we have been made partakers of it, by considering its evidences and effects.

SECONDLY : The effects and evidences of divine manifestations.

First : A deep conviction (proportioned to the manifestation) of the meanness, unworthiness, guilt, past and present sinfulness of the soul thus favored ; humbling its pride, and filling it with self-abasement. This is exemplified in the language of Old-testament saints. Thus *Jacob*, " I am less than the least of thy mercies." *Job*, " Now I repent and abhor myself." *David*, " Who am I, and what is my father's house ?" *Isaiah*, " Woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips." *Daniel*, " My comeliness is turned into corruption." And *Jude*, in the text, *How is it, that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world ?*

Secondly : A conviction of our entire dependance on Christ, both for righteousness and strength ; thankfully falling in with the design of his redemption ; resting with complacency in his plan of salvation ; feeling our need of his mediation ; and sensible of our weakness and insufficiency to follow the Lord, except continually upheld.

Thirdly : An assurance of the reality and excellence of the objects manifested ; i. e. the person and grace of Christ. They shine with such a divine glory, that they needs must be realized.

Fourthly : A conviction that there is much more to be seen and admired in Christ, than has yet been manifested to the soul ; and consequently an earnest increasing desire, to know, love, and enjoy more, which prevents resting in present attainments, and induces the soul to resolve never to stop its pursuit, till it shall enjoy all it wants, and awake in the complete likeness of Christ.

Fifthly : A glorying in this salvation, renouncing all other Saviours, and all other portions ; as seeing that

there is enough in him to satisfy, though in the want of all things; and that all other things are nothing without him.

Sixthly: A concern to honor and glorify, in all possible ways, this blessed Redeemer; never thinking he can be exalted enough; longing that others may see, admire, love, and be devoted to him.

Seventhly: Tenderness of conscience, fearing the least sin, or rather looking on none as little; with a jealousy of our own hearts, and a holy fear of dishonoring God our Saviour.

Eighthly: Not only a spirit of devotion towards God, and peculiar complacency in his people; but universal benevolence, or a spirit of pure, gentle, humble, meek, patient, forgiving, disinterested love towards all mankind.

Ninthly: The transforming efficacy of these manifestations, producing universal holiness and love to all God's commandments.

Tenthly: Preparation for heaven, anticipating both its enjoyments and employments; drawing off the affections from the world, and causing them to be set on things above.

Hence learn, That God has a peculiar people, who are the objects of his sovereign, distinguishing love. Can any of you, who have seen his glory, account for it in any other way?

The unspeakable excellence of true religion. How far are its pleasures preferable to all others!

We may hence learn, The nature of vital faith.

1. That it is somewhat *more* than a bare assent to the truth of speculative notions.

2. That it is somewhat *better* than a bare assurance of interest in God's love, or that Christ died for me. And that the *essence* of faith, and especially the first act of faith, does not consist in believing that Christ is mine, or that he died for me in particular.

For, (1.) There is no such proposition in scripture, as that Christ died for any one in particular, except such as answer to gospel descriptions; or otherwise for the elect, who cannot be known till they are

made to answer these descriptions. (2.) Nor could this be true faith, upon the plan of general redemption; for then every one who admitted that sentiment would be saved, which no sober Arminian would assert. (3.) If there were such a proposition in scripture, it would require no change of nature to believe it; nor would there be any thing gracious in the belief of it. Suppose God should tell an unconverted man that Christ died for him, that his sins were forgiven him, or that he was elected, without a spiritual manifestation, he would only be the same or worse than ever.

3. True faith is a high and exalted thought of Christ, the testimony of God concerning him being received as *true*, and *good*, as well as true, so that he is accounted altogether lovely, and his salvation worthy of all acceptation. He is considered worthy that God should intrust his glory, and we our immortal souls, in his hands. Thus they who applied to Christ when he was upon earth, came with a confidence in his power, and a high opinion of his goodness, tenderness, and willingness to relieve; but without an assurance of his goodwill to them in particular.

Learn, how Christians should judge of their experiences. Not by manner, impulses, &c. but by their nature and effects.

What a gift is Christ! What a blessing is his mediation!

(1.) Without a Mediator, we should have had no such glorious manifestations of God. He has revealed him. "He that has seen me, has seen the Father."

(2.) Without a Mediator, it would not have been consistent with God's dignity and purity to have manifested himself to us.

(3.) No discovery of God, without Christ, could have afforded any relief or consolation to such sinners as we are.

LXXXI.

CHRISTIAN FRUITFULNESS.

JOHN xv. 8.

Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit ; so shall ye be my disciples.

THIS chapter contains a very instructive and endearing account of our Lord's conversation with his disciples, just before his last sufferings : in which he illustrates the necessity and advantage of union with himself, by a beautiful comparison ; representing himself as the vine, his Father as the husbandman, and his people as the branches ; charging them to abide in him ; cultivating a constant regard to him, as the source of every good ; and living perpetually on his fulness : that thus they may not only enjoy the blessed fruit of his mediation, in peace of conscience, and a sense of acceptance with God, but may also be made fruitful in every good word and work. This is the object he particularly inculcates in the words of the text, enforcing it by additional arguments.

Let us endeavor to consider,

FIRST, The nature of Christian fruitfulness.

It consists not in a mere external form of worship. Too many, who have worn the Christian name, have placed it in this ; yea, sometimes have laid the greatest stress on such circumstances and modes of worship as were never commanded in the word of God. Surely in vain do they worship him, who teach for doctrines, or ordinances, the commandments of men. Matt. xv. 9. But supposing the form to be ever so simple or scriptural, it is of no avail if not attended with proper affections, and connected with a due regard to the will of God, in our daily intercourse with our fellow-men.

Nor in mere selfish affections. If we place our confidence in the flesh, and rejoice not in Christ Jesus alone ; but are affected with our own duties and religious exercises, as supposing they are meritorious of the divine favor ; all is rank pride and self-righteousness : though such may say to others, " Stand by thyself, come not near me, I am holier than thou," they are more offensive to God than the vilest

profligate. And if we make a righteousness of our notions, and disguise our pride under a cloak of evangelical phrases, having received the word with joy, in hope of security from torment, while we never were willing for the Saviour to be our king; the case is as bad, or worse: They who never felt the *justice* of God in condemning sin, could never duly estimate his *grace* in the pardon of sinners. Let their joys be now ever so high, under a persuasion that God is their particular friend; and let their former terrors have been ever so great; still, if their joy is not joy in the Holy Spirit; if their faith does not purify the heart and work by love; all is vain and delusive. Nor in mere outward decency and worldly wisdom. A prudent self-love may teach us to abstain from various indulgences, that would be injurious to our bodies, or our property. A well-conducted worldly principle may induce us to act with veracity, integrity, and good nature. This may induce us to show a plausible appearance of honesty and benevolence: and yet, there may be no regard to God, his will, or his glory; no universal or disinterested benevolence; and no regard to the highest welfare and eternal interest of any man.

But Christian fruitfulness ever springs from an internal principle of holy love; from supreme love to God, and disinterested love to man. It implies that God is known, in some measure, in his true character; and the farther it is made known, the more it suits the renewed soul; who gratefully unites with Christ in the design of his redemption, and is pleased with his whole plan of redemption, not merely as constrained by necessity, but as charmed with its beauty and propriety. And hence will arise, ardent zeal for the divine truth and ordinances. Such will love the word of God, every part of it. The holy law, the glorious gospel, the precious truths which give such exalted ideas of God, which secure the glory of his government and grace. While they rejoice in the privileges of God's children, they will desire to know the full extent of duty. They will avow their relation to God, and not be ashamed of his doctrine, nor of his appointments. It will appear in the due regulation of our appetites and passions. We shall be afraid of setting up any idol in God's

stead; and be jealous of our own hearts, lest they should wander from him. We shall receive every good thing from him, value it as a token of his bounty, and as that in the use and employment of which, we may show our good will to him, and advance his glory; submitting our wills to God's will, resigning all we possess to his wise and sovereign disposal, and casting all our care on him who careth for us.

The same principle will influence the whole conduct. Inward religion, if it be genuine, will show itself, not only in our words, our profession, our attendance on public worship, and ordinances, but also in our deportment among men, by acts of righteousness, self-denial, meekness, and true benevolence; delight in the communion of saints, readiness to sympathize with our Christian brethren; in taking complacency in the image of Christ, labouring to extend his cause, pitying the souls of men, adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour; and in doing good to the bodies of men, with a farther view to their spiritual benefit, that we may recommend religion to them, and bring them to a conviction of its reality and importance. Rom. xiv. 18.

In all, we should eye eternity, looking for and hasting to the day of the Lord; living here as strangers and pilgrims; having our conversation in heaven; longing for a state of perfection; raised above the smiles and frowns of the world, by the hope of a heavenly inheritance.

SECONDLY: The advantages of a peculiar fruitfulness. *Herein, says our Lord, is my Father glorified.*

It will advance the divine glory. It tends to the honor of God's *righteous government*, the support of which is, in the economy of redemption, assigned to the Father. For a sinner to expect justification by his own works, would have no such tendency; but for a justified believer to submit to Christ's authority, while he relies on his obedience unto death, has this tendency. For him to imitate Christ's example, while he depends on his atonement, honors the Father; nor can our heavenly Father be glorified, without these are united.

It glorifies the Father by showing the *holy tendency* of the gospel of salvation, which furnishes the most effectual motives to obedience. This honors the wisdom of

God, who could release us from obligation to punishment, without relaxing obligation to obedience; and saves from sin itself, as well as its awful consequences. It glorifies the *efficacious grace of God*; and shows the power of his Spirit to mortify the deeds of the body, to strengthen against temptation, to overcome the love of the world and fear of man, and to excite to holy activity for God.

It will evince our being genuine disciples of Christ. *So shall ye be my disciples.*

When we bear much fruit, our relation to Christ is fully manifested. There is no part of Christian fruitfulness, respecting which we may not look to him as our most perfect example. He has given us a perfect directory in his holy word, and left us a complete example in the history of his own life. He has especially exemplified the most difficult duties: self-denial, bearing the cross, resignation to the greatest sufferings; to poverty, injuries, persecution, death; the most disinterested benevolence, and love to enemies. And he never was weary of his work: though so arduous, he was always at it.

They who bear *much* fruit are scholars of the *highest* class. This should be our object, to learn of him as much as we can; not as little as will do to avoid correction, or utter rejection.

The more fruit we bear, the easier will it be to prove our union with Christ, or to ascertain that we are his disciples at all: which may well be doubtful to *ourselves*, if this be not our constant aim.

Thus we shall appear to *others* to be his disciples, and shall show them what kind of master we have, what lessons he teaches, what a pattern he sets us. People may see by us, what genuine Christianity is. Isa. lxi. 9.

Such shall at last be owned by Christ as his disciples. He will openly confess those, who were not ashamed of him. He will treat them as his peculiar care; both in this world and in the world to come. Isa. lx. 21. lxi. 3. Matt. x. 32. xxv. 34. Rev. iii. 5.

O then, let it be our concern to glorify our heavenly Father, not merely in *words*, but by *works*. Both should go together, but the latter is of most importance. Not by giving him that which costs little or nothing, but by devoting our all to

him ; not by constraint, but of a ready mind : accounting it an honor and a privilege to be the Lord's, and valuing earthly possessions chiefly for this use of them.

LXXXII.

THE HOLY SPIRIT THE AUTHOR OF CONVICTION.

JOHN xvi. 8.

And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.

THE subject which calls for our attention this evening, will necessarily occupy so much of our time, that we cannot stop to notice, except in a very transient way, various important truths which are closely connected with it, and confirmed or illustrated by it. The Father asserts the rights of Deity common to the sacred Trinity. The Son becoming incarnate, satisfies divine justice, and acts as Mediator for man with God. And the Holy Spirit operates in man for God ; leading the soul into the knowledge of the truth ; drawing it to Christ ; and restoring the lost image of God, by renewing and sanctifying grace ; working conviction in the mind, of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. But we cannot enlarge on each of these now. I only just remark, that in the demonstration of sin, is manifested the holiness of the Father ; in the demonstration of righteousness, the all-sufficiency of the Son ; in the demonstration of judgment, the power of the Spirit. In *sin*, is comprehended the misery ; in *righteousness*, the salvation ; and in *judgment*, the gratitude of a saved sinner. The Spirit convinces of *sin*, to make the sinner desire salvation ; he unfolds the method of justification by the *righteousness* of Christ, to keep him from despair, and inspire the hope of salvation ; and, that he may not abuse this hope to carnal security, he unfolds the whole method of *judgment* founded on this righteousness.

But we must now confine our attention to the first branch only—the *spiritual conviction of sin* ; and shall consider the need, the end, the means, and the test of the conviction of

sin, which is effected by the special agency of the Holy Spirit.

FIRST : The *need* of the Holy Spirit to convince us of sin.

This work is indisputably necessary, whether you consider the tendency of sin to blind the mind to its own evil, or the necessity of our being convinced of it in order to our duly appreciating the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. No-

thing is more evident, from daily experience, than that the predominance of particular vices has a blinding effect. Pride, covetousness, and even intemperance, sensuality, and dishonesty, often blind men to their obvious consequences, much more to their evil nature. And this is more so, as to sin in general ; especially as to its chief evil, which consists in violating obligations to an invisible being. The wicked “ flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful.”

The whole world of mankind is apostatized from God, and at the widest distance from all concord of sentiment and disposition with him. All have sinned, and fallen short of his glory. Should he enter into judgment, none could stand ; every mouth must be stopped, and the whole world be found guilty before him, and without excuse. Neither the knowledge and privileges of the Jews, nor the ignorance and disadvantages of the gentiles would avail them. And so it is still, with all the world, collectively and individually considered.

The Holy Spirit alone can effectually work conviction in the mind of a sinner, so as to give him a just idea of the controversy between God and a revolted world, and bring him over to God’s side, to justify God, and condemn himself. Yet this must be done, or he will not accept of Christ’s salvation. It was our Lord’s own maxim : “ The whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick.” “ I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

A man must know himself to be sick, before he will apply to a physician ; and in proportion to the idea he has of his disease, as dangerous, and almost desperate, will be his concern to have the very best advice : and he must be sensible that he is very poor, to induce him to seek one that will administer relief gratis.

He must know himself to be insolvent, ere he will be anxious to obtain a

surety, and highly value him, and trust to no one who is not exceedingly rich. He must know that he has given offence to a superior of great dignity, whose favor is very desirable, and whose displeasure would be ruinous, to induce him highly to value a Mediator; and if the only advocate who could be employed with the least hope of success, is a rigid friend to *righteousness*, who will use no means in favor of the offender but such as are most honorable to him that has been offended, and who will certainly justify him fully, and utterly condemn the conduct of the criminal; then the offender must be brought to view affairs in much the same light, or he will not thankfully accept of his mediation; and if compelled to do so by the urgency of the danger, he will be inwardly grieved and dissatisfied. And just so—a man must know himself to be a sinner; yea, a great sinner, ere he will deeply repent, and plead a great atonement: he must be convinced of the utter insufficiency of his own righteousness to justify him, ere he can be induced to plead the righteousness of another, and, utterly abandoning every self-righteous plea, and sin-extenuating excuse, resolve to make mention of that only in his application for mercy. But no one can see the evil of sin, while the love of sin is predominant in the heart. It is therefore the Holy Spirit alone, who must convince us of sin; who is so called, as being not only infinitely holy himself, but also as the author of all holiness in the heart of man. The first symptom of a change of heart will be a pungent sense of our own unworthiness, demerit, and odiousness in the sight of God, grounded on a sense of his infinite glory and excellence, and our obligations to love and serve him, and of the perfect equity of his holy requirements, and the justice of his displeasure against sin; with a consequent conviction that there is no hope for us, but from free, sovereign, unmerited, and wonderful grace; and a deep conviction of the infinite propriety of God's taking care of his own character, honor, and government, while he shows mercy to creatures so vile and hell-deserving. Now, though all the men in the world have much sin chargeable upon them, yet they are very hard to be convinced of it, especially of their chief sin, the sin of

their hearts; their entire sinfulness; their sin against the invisible God. Their sin greatly consists in pride and selfishness; but this above all things, prevents their seeing its evil. Nor can it ever be rectified, but by the efficacious influence of the Holy Spirit.

SECONDLY: The *end* for which conviction of sin is necessary.

Not to make any amends to God for our transgressions, or to render us worthy of his pardoning mercy; nor to be any ground of self-preference; nor to recommend us to Christ.

But to make us willing to implore pardon in the name of Jesus, to make us sensible of our need of his mediation and atonement, and of our infinite obligations to free grace.

Hence our Lord, in the 9th verse, particularly mentions, the Spirit's convincing of the sin of unbelief. The gospel of Christ takes it for granted, that all men are sinners, and that their condemnation is as just as it is dreadful and inevitable, without the gracious interposition of such a Redeemer.

It was the Saviour's avowed design to magnify the law, and make it honorable; and none can truly receive him, while they continue utterly averse to this part of his plan. But no one will coincide with this object on which the Mediator was so intent, till the Holy Spirit works in him a conviction that God was right, and he was wrong.

The genuine gospel cannot be received sincerely, by any one whose prejudice against the law remains unsubdued.

At the same time, the gospel is the fullest test of the depraved disposition of mankind, at once proving the reality and the criminality of their opposition to God.

Some seem to suppose that the only ground of the sinner's enmity to God, is the severity of his law. Now, I fear, that it is a rare thing for sinners to believe that he is so severe as his law implies; but if this were the only cause of his enmity, it would be at once removed by the assurance of his readiness to forgive, or by the bare publication of such an act of grace.

Surely, if there were any remaining goodness in the human heart, such a plan of salvation would have been embraced with the utmost ardor, as soon as made known. Luke xx. 13. Verily, Christ's coming is the

occasion of men's hearts being revealed : Luke ii. 35. Jews and Gentiles. O what a stupid world, not to know its Maker ! What an ungrateful world, not to welcome its Saviour ! What a horrid world, to murder the Lord of glory ! And as the import and end of his death is an evidence of the unspeakable evil of sin ; so the kind of reception which his gospel generally meets, is a further evidence of its desperate malignity. Alas ! how many reject the counsel of God against themselves ! Many directly deny the gospel to be a revelation from God. Others profess to allow the authenticity of the New Testament, and yet refuse to credit its most important discoveries. Others verbally admit them, yet they make no answerable impressions on their hearts. They say, that Christ is the only Saviour, yet never flee to him for refuge. They do not cordially believe his excellence, suitability, and fulness ; do not realize the worth of his great salvation. And none will do this, till the *Holy Spirit* works conviction in their hearts : then they will account all things but loss, for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ. But how shall they, who will not believe what God has said of sin, and its infinite evil, believe what he has said of Christ, and his infinite preciousness ?

THIRDLY : The *means* ordinarily employed by this divine agent.

I must confess that I am strongly inclined to believe, that what is most essential and primary in this affair, depends on an immediate operation of the Holy Spirit on the heart ; which is superior to all means, and cannot be explained by man, nor can it be discerned by others, or by the subject himself, except by its consequences. John iii. 8. Eccl. xi. 5, 6. But the different effect of means, before or after it, is such as to indicate that the heart of a free penitent has been touched by God. Then means are found to have an amazingly different effect. Yet it is probable that this holy afflatus is often preceded by partial awakenings of natural conscience ; and I question much if the most acute observer can often discriminate where that which is natural ends, and that which is spiritual begins : nor can the subject of this change often tell the exact time when it took place ;

and perhaps some who think they can do so, may make a harmless mistake.

But thus much we may observe, that sometimes the dispensations of providence may be rendered subservient to rouse the attention to divine things ; and still oftener, the word read or preached ; yea, sometimes a notorious sin may be over-ruled to alarm the conscience ; and often a reflection on some particular evil, whether recent or not, may have this effect.

It is clear, that Joseph's brethren were first convinced of the sin of selling their brother by their imprisonment in Egypt ; and probable, that they might from this be first led to the consideration of their sinfulness in other respects. Saul of Tarsus was first convinced of his sin in persecuting the church, by the immediate appearance of the Lord Jesus ; and then led to examine his whole life, during three days of solitude and blindness. Three thousand Jews were pricked to the heart under Peter's sermon ; but the effect was to be ascribed, not to the extraordinary or miraculous influence of the Spirit, of which they were eye-witnesses, nor yet to the powerful address of the Apostle ; but to the special, internal operation of the Holy Spirit ; without which, they, like the hearers of Stephen, who were cut to the heart, and gnashed upon him with their teeth, would only have been filled with resentment and rage.

But when the *Holy Spirit* works conviction in the heart, how happy, and how different is the effect ! Then the law is freely admitted to be holy, just, and good ; and the gospel to be glorious, and gracious, and worthy of all acceptance. This leads me to consider,

FOURTHLY, The *test* by which we may determine whether our convictions proceed from his agency.

Under this head, I may briefly advert to *the distinction between the convictions of natural conscience, and those produced by the Holy Spirit.*

The subjects of the former, may be greatly burdened with a sense of the evil of *some* sins, but are not convinced of the evil of sin *universally*.

The former are chiefly alarmed at the *consequences* of sin ; but the latter are truly impressed with a sense of its odious *nature*. Even in respect to *consequences*, though both think them dreadful, the latter only

are deeply sensible that they are just. The former are much terrified, till they obtain some hope of safety ; but when that is attained, their conviction abates : but the latter are abidingly humbled ; and their self-abasement is increased, when they enjoy the strongest hopes of pardon. Ezek. xvi. 63.

The former would be glad to get rid of their convictions ; but the latter earnestly wish to have them increase : they wish to see more of the evil of sin, and have every sin detected and mortified, as well as pardoned.

The distress of the former may be, for a time very great ; the latter are permanently humbled.

The former may feign submission, but the latter thankfully embrace salvation by grace.

The former are ready to be proud of their humiliation ; the latter are grieved at their remaining pride and hardness of heart, and long to lie lower before God.

But the most distinguishing difference of all is, that the former, after awhile, find relief in some other way, than in fully accepting the atonement or reconciliation ; while the latter are brought most cordially to acquiesce in the plan of salvation by the blood of the Lamb.

They are not offended, with either the humbling import, or the holy tendency of the gospel. They could not be satisfied with their own salvation, but in a way of righteousness ; nor could they be content with bare exemption from punishment, without a restoration to the holy image of God. But they rejoice that grace reigns through righteousness, and that God is exalted in showing mercy ; they long and hope to behold his face in righteousness, and cannot be satisfied till they awake up in his likeness.

Thus the Holy Spirit convinces of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Of sin, to show our absolute need of Christ ; of righteousness, to show the sufficiency of Christ ; of judgment, to show the tendency of his salvation.

He cures self-righteous pride, by showing the impossibility of being justified by a law we have broken.

He prevents despondency, by showing the sufficiency of Christ's atonement and righteousness.

He cures the love of sin, by showing what a tyrant we used to obey, and what a blessed

king is Jesus. He discovers man's guilt, God's righteousness, and Satan's condemnation. He produces humility, hope, and holiness. Works in us repentance, faith, and new obedience.

He to whom this work is ascribed, is styled the Comforter. True conviction precedes consolation; and gospel consolation increases tenderness and conviction. Conviction of sin precedes conviction of righteousness; for no one will prize Christ's righteousness till convinced of sin: and conviction of righteousness precedes conviction of judgment; for Satan never will be dispossessed till we believe in Christ.

But, pass lightly over the import of the death of Christ, which so fully displays God's abhorrence of sin; begin with saying that the law is done with, that you need not concern yourself with any dispute whether its commands were right or wrong, or its penalty just or unjust; only believe you are pardoned, without any other evidence;—and there is nothing in such a gospel to displease the carnal heart!

LXXXIII.

CHRIST'S DISCIPLES NOT OF THE WORLD.

JOHN xvii. 16.

They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

BRETHREN! These are the words of Jesus Christ, twice repeated, within a very short space, in his last solemn prayer to his Father. Their meaning must be important; and they refer not merely to the apostles, but to all whom the Father hath given him, or all who have been effectually called. They sufficiently show that our being born in any particular nation, will not prove us to be Christians; nor yet an external connexion with any denomination.

I fear, also, that they will too certainly evince, that the generality of those who make the most plausible profession of religion, are very deficient in their degree of conformity to Christ; and in the consistency of their conduct with their profession. However, we hope Christ has still a people upon earth to whom this description is applicable. May we

impartially examine his meaning in this expression, and try the nature and degree of our religion by it! Let us consider,

FIRST : The import of this assertion.

I think it evidently implies a reflection upon the world, that the moral state of mankind is not as it should be; that men in general are of a depraved, corrupt taste. That they have apostatized from God, and are taken up with objects unworthy of their chief attention. That they are very wrong in their practice, very sinful in their disposition; do not act in Christianity as rational and immortal creatures. The whole world lies in wickedness. Unregenerate men regard neither the divine glory, the general good, nor their own noblest interests. Whereas,

True Christians are of a peculiar, distinguishing taste. Though they are in the world, yet they are not of it. They were chosen out of the world, and given to Christ, in the decree of election, and by effectual calling. The disposition that predominates in them, is not that which was native to them, in common with mankind in general; nor has it been produced by mere human suasion: but was imparted by God, who renewed them in the spirit of their minds, and made them new creatures. Superior objects to any which earth can exhibit have been discovered to them: they are taught to realize things invisible, but eternal; and seek an happiness more substantial than any that can be derived from things below, which perish with the using. The existence and excellence of this happiness, and the way of obtaining it, are discovered by their blessed Lord. This world therefore, is no longer their home; their citizenship is not here. They are strangers on earth; as persons sojourning in a strange land, or only travelling through it. They wish not to have their abode below; nor can any accommodations by the way make them forget home, or dispose them to settle here. And if they meet with ill usage, it is no more than what they might look for, and be content to put up with; since they will leave it so soon. It is doubtless to be expected, that their chief anxieties, joys, and sorrows, will have reference to

the other world; that their thoughts will be employed mostly about it, and their affections chiefly set upon it. Their hopes will centre there; and their present pursuits must be congruous to their future expectations.

It must be expected that their conduct will differ from that of the men of the world, as it will be influenced by a regard to that world to which they properly belong. For though they subsist in the world, yet they are not of the world; even as their blessed Lord was not of this world.

This leads us to consider,

SECONDLY: The reasonableness of this declaration.

It is very evident that our blessed Lord was not of the world; he was from above; he was well acquainted with a more glorious world than this; he came into this world, not to seek a private temporal interest of his own, but to glorify God by the salvation of his people. He never affected worldly greatness; never sought honor from men; never hoarded earthly riches; never indulged himself in sensual pleasure; never sought earthly enjoyments. He was far from a worldly spirit; he neither accommodated himself to the taste of the men of the world, nor sought to recommend himself to their applause; but bore witness to the most unpalatable truths, and thus exposed himself to the world's hatred; and taught his disciples to expect that they must deny themselves, take up the cross, and follow him. He suggested that Satan was the prince of this world; and taught his disciples to expect tribulation in the world.

And now, it is reasonable that his people should show that they are not of the world, even as he was not of the world.

He was the best judge of all things, earthly and heavenly; and we may safely go by his estimate.

He neither placed his happiness in the things of the world, nor did the men of the world regard him: it is therefore to be expected that his followers will side with their Lord, against the world; not with the world against him.

We profess to be the entire property of our Redeemer, having been bought with the price of his own blood.

If we are Christians indeed, we are vitally united to Christ; so united to him as to be one spirit.

We profess to

believe that he has entered for us, as our forerunner ; that he is gone to prepare a place for us ; and has promised to come again, that he may receive us to himself. We profess to expect a state of happiness widely different from earthly happiness ; which will last for ever, be uncloying, and afford us full satisfaction to all eternity. Let us consider then,

THIRDLY : The influence which this declaration should have on our temper and conduct.

Since our Lord so repeatedly declares of his people, " They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world ;"—let us examine, if this declaration can be applied to us.

Must all around us own the justice of it ? Can we aver, Like "as he is, so are we in this world." 1 John iv. 17. If so, may not this assertion be expected to appear,

In our management of our *worldly business* ? Many of us are lawfully employed in the world ; but is it not to be expected that things temporal will be evidently made subordinate to things spiritual ; that Christians will conduct secular concerns with more dependance, prayer, acknowledgment of God, resignation, moderation, suppression of covetousness, integrity, veracity, and compassion, than other men ?

As to the use of our *property* ? Are you in this respect more sensible of accountableness to God, more benevolent, more concerned to do good to the souls as well as to the bodies of men ; to honor the Lord with your substance, to show you have not made gold your god ?

As to our *pleasures and amusements* ? Who would waste his time in trifles, when called to attend to affairs of unspeakable importance ? Who would risque his property in the uncertainties of a gaming table, who had a trade connected with a superior and more certain profit ? Who would need to derive amusement from the representations of idle fictions, who has been taught to realize facts infinitely more astonishing and interesting than any that the heart of man can conceive ? Who would

envy the pleasures of an insect, when he had tasted the joys of angels?

As to our peculiar *friendships*? Who would want the company of the children of the wicked one, when he might associate with the children of God, and enjoy communion with God himself?

As to our improvement of *time*? Though time is of so little importance, separately considered; yet how great is its worth connected with eternity! "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work." Can you persuade others to become emigrants, and seek, with you, after another country?

As to our anxiety for our *children*? What turn does it take? That they may be rich and great? Or that they may be devoted to God, and become heirs of his heavenly kingdom?

As to our views of *death*? If we are not of this world, as our Lord was not of this world, why are we so reluctant to leave it? Why so little eager in our aspirations after a state of perfection? Why do we not, with Paul, long to depart and be with Christ, which is far better? Why do we not long for conquest, rather than for conflict? For the presence of God, rather than absence from him? For perfection, rather than for sin?

LXXXIV.

JESUS AND MOSES COMPARED.

ACTS iii. 22.

For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me: him shall ye hear in all things, whatsoever he shall say unto you.

JESUS, though ever represented as a pattern of the deepest humility, yet scrupled not to affirm of himself that he was greater than Jonas, or than Solomon. Matt. xii. 41, 42. Luke xi. 31. 23. In this passage, he is compared with Moses, and is elsewhere represented as having far the pre-eminence

above him. Heb. iii. 3—6. Moses, in the law, wrote of him. John i. 45. Luke xxiv. 44. As he recorded the first promise to Adam, to Abraham, the prophecy of Jacob, of Balaam, &c. So he himself foretold him in this passage, which is quoted from Deut. xviii. 18. which is expressly applied to our Lord by Peter, and also by Stephen. We shall be led by it, to trace the resemblance between Christ and Moses; to show the fulfilment of Moses's prophecy in Christ; and manifest his superiority also. We will consider,

FIRST, The justice of the application.

Eusebius, and after him Dr. Jortin, have pointed out a great number of particulars, wherein there appears to have been a resemblance between Moses and Christ: some of which appear rather incidental and circumstantial, than essential to the fulfilment of the prophecy. Moses was providentially delivered from the slaughter of the children by Pharoah. Jesus, from the slaughter of the children by Herod. Moses fled from the persecution of Pharoah, and was, by an angel, directed to return, because the men were dead who sought his life. When Jesus was carried into Egypt, the angel, nearly in the same words, directed Joseph to return. Moses wrought many miracles; so indeed, did some other prophets; but so, especially, did Christ. Moses led the people through the sea; Christ led Peter on the sea. Moses obtained the healing of Miriam's leprosy; Christ healed many lepers. Moses fed the people in the Wilderness; Christ fed thousands in a desert place. Moses fasted forty days; so did Christ. Moses's face shone; so Christ's. Moses refused the expectancy of a kingdom; Christ refused to be made a king. Moses sent twelve spies into Canaan; Christ, twelve apostles into the world. Moses chose seventy elders, on whom his spirit rested; Christ, seventy disciples, to whom he imparted spiritual gifts.

But those things are of more consequence, which appertained to Moses as a prophet, or which, by their connexion with him in that character, distinguished him above other prophets: and wherein the resemblance, and yet the superiority of Jesus, is more remarkable. Moses was superior

to the other prophets of the Old Testament, not so much by being learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, as by being admitted to peculiar intimacy with God. Numb. xii. 6—8. Yet, even herein, is Jesus still superior; in whom, not only are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, but who is the only-begotten of the Father; who is in the bosom of the Father, and hath fully revealed him. So that, while

Moses was excluded from Canaan, for seeming in one instance to arrogate to himself the power of working miracles; Jesus used much more authoritative language, without displeasing his Father. As, “I will; be thou clean.” “Lazarus, come forth!” “Young man, *I say unto thee, Arise.*” “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” Moses

was a prophet, and at the same time acted the part of a king too: he is called king in Jeshurun. He is not called a priest, yet he seems to have officiated as one, (Exod. xxix.) until after the consecration of Aaron. And he showed his disinterestedness in not securing either royalty or the priesthood to his own family. Jesus is really prophet, priest, and king, united. Moses was meek above all men: Numb. xii. 9.

yet he was often murmured at, by his countrymen; (Acts vii. 27. 35. 39.) and even threatened to be stoned by them. Numb. xiv. 10. Jesus is meek and lowly in heart, beyond Moses: yet he endured the contradictions of sinners against himself; (Heb. xii. 3.) who repeatedly took up stones to stone him. John viii. 59. x. 31. Moses was zealous

for God’s glory, and faithful in all his house. Jesus was infinitely zealous for the house of God, and for the divine honor in all respects. John ii. 17. And he is a merciful and faithful high priest. Moses was a mediator for Israel, he acted

as the internuncio between them and God. He pleaded for them, and offered to die for them, rather than they should be cut off. Exod. xxxii. 52. Jesus is the great Mediator of the New Covenant. A prophet, in this respect, like unto Moses, but far superior; who actually died for his people, but lives again to make intercession for them, in the most glorious, prevalent manner.

Moses delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage, and the tyranny of Pharoah. Jesus delivers his people from spiritual bondage, and the more

cruel tyranny of Satan. Moses guided Israel through the wilderness to the borders of Canaan. Jesus leads his people through a wilderness to glory. Moses obtained for Israel, victory over Amalek. Exod. xvii. Jesus gives his people victory over all spiritual enemies. Moses was a teacher of pure morality. The law came by Moses. Jesus could not be like him, if he came to repeal or alter it. But, in fact, he came to honor the law. He has discovered the greatest zeal for its honor. As a *prophet*, by explaining it. As a *priest*, by fulfilling and magnifying it. As a *king*, by writing it on the hearts of his people. Moses gave out a number of positive institutions, and ordinances of worship, which no true prophet ever did besides ; but made no alteration of instituted worship. David regulated the singers, &c. but appointed no new ordinances. Jesus fulfilled the types of the Old Testament. The priesthood, tabernacle, sacrifices, ark, &c. were all a shadow of good things to come, the substance of which is in Christ. He has also appointed new ordinances, to continue to the end of the world. In short, Moses introduced a new dispensation, and established the worship of God among one nation fifteen hundred years. Christ introduced a new dispensation, harmonizing with the former, but superceding and surpassing it. Not suited to the former confined state of the church, but adapted to a far more extensive church ; having called all nations to the obedience of faith. I only add, The soul that despised Moses's law died without mercy. And Moses himself threatened dreadful judgments on those who should not receive his great successor here foretold. Dreadful judgments have come on the Jews for rejecting him ; and dreadful will be the lot of all unbelievers.

SECONDLY : The improvement we should make of the subject. Consider,

First, What evidence may be deduced from hence, of the divine mission, both of Moses and of Jesus. Would an impostor predict the rise of another impostor as his superior ? Would he not wish his own religion to last for ever ? Could he insure success to another, 1490 years before the second pretender to inspiration was born ? And who could have

conjectured that the only people who ever gave ear to the first, would reject the second? though there was the most perfect agreement in the substance, scope, and end of their principles. Notwithstanding which, the religion of the second should spread above twenty times farther than the first; and the Jews, who always prospered while they adhered to Moses, till they rejected Christ, have, ever since they murdered him, been pursued by divine vengeance; though not suffered, amidst all their calamities, to become extinct!

Secondly: What will it avail, that we allow Christ is that prophet, unless we cordially receive his instructions, and enter into the spirit of his doctrine? This none can do, unless they acknowledge him also as *priest*, and also as *king*: for he taught, that both these characters belong to him. And he must be received by us in all his offices, or we fall under the guilt of rejecting him altogether. What God hath joined together, let no one attempt to put asunder.

Examine. Do you listen implicitly to his instructions? Do you rely solely on his atoning sacrifice? Do you submit unreservedly to his government? Take notice: The meaning of 2 Cor. iii. 15. is not, that minding Moses causes rejection of Christ. John v. 46. How careful was God, that Moses should not be idolized, and made too much of! Not so respecting Christ. All the danger lies on the other side.

LXXXV.

REPENTANCE AN UNIVERSAL DUTY.

ACTS xvii. 30.

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.

I HAVE sometimes been ready to fear, that there is a greater neglect of the doctrine of repentance, by many evangelical preachers, than there is of any other subject so frequently mentioned in the Holy Scriptures. Perhaps some may be afraid, lest dwelling on this topic should lead men off from the consideration of faith in Christ; but our Lord himself,

with his forerunner and his Apostles, considered repentance and faith as harmoniously connected. Some, if they touch on the duty of repentance, are careful to represent it as subsequent to faith; but this is contrary to the usual order of scripture, and surely to the order of nature. A debtor cannot trust in a surety to pay his debts, unless he is aware that he has debts to pay, and such as exceed his ability to discharge. Much less could a man thankfully accept of the good services of a Mediator who decidedly took part with the person he had offended, unless he began to be sensible, not only of his danger, but of his fault, and viewed the controversy much in the same light with the Mediator. We would ever wish to guard you against substituting your repentance in the place of Christ's atonement, or encouraging you to expect that cleansing from your tears, which can only be found in his blood. We would not put you upon looking into yourselves for any thing to recommend you to the Saviour; but would represent the free invitations of the gospel, as the only warrant to authorize your application to him. But we wish you to look into yourselves to see your need of Christ; and as none value the physician, but the sick, we would endeavor to convince you of your misery, guilt, and depravity; that thus you may feel your need of salvation, forgiveness, and renovation. Nothing need be more evident than this—that the Apostles, wherever they went, treated all men as sinners: Jews, heathens, Greeks, barbarians, bond, or free. At licentious Corinth, or learned Athens, they insisted on the same truths. As Paul here tells the Athenians, though God had overlooked the times of ignorance, yet now he commanded all men every where to repent. He overlooked, &c.; not that he did not know the state of the heathen world, or exercise a moral government over them; but he left them to themselves, without using those means for their recovery, which, under the gospel dispensation, he has authorized his ministers to employ, wherever they can find access to their fellow-men.

FIRST: The duty enjoined. Repentance, or a change of mind respecting their own sinful disposition and conduct.

It implies an apprehension of *danger*, from the divine displeasure, as that to which we are obnoxious, and which we cannot escape, resist, or endure; and also a conviction of the *justice* of that displeasure, that we have really deserved it, and are unable to appease or avert it.

It often begins with a conviction of the evil of some particular act, of an external and visible kind; but if it be genuine, it will extend to all that is contrary to the revealed will of God; so that we shall condemn whatever he condemns; and that especially, on account of its opposition to him.

It extends to the very purposes and dispositions of the heart; leading the penitent to acknowledge his native depravity, not as an excuse for his transgressions, but an aggravation; and to see the evil of neglecting and disregarding God, and of indulging an undutiful temper toward him.

It may vary greatly as to the degree of surprize, terror, and anguish of spirit attending it; but wherever it is genuine, the evil of sin will be realized, as it is against God.

The penitent will be grieved for his transgressions, ashamed of the turpitude of his conduct, will fully justify God, and sincerely condemn himself.

A thorough penitent can never suppose himself able to make satisfaction for his transgressions, nor pretend that his penitence is any compensation for his crimes. He will be willing to submit to sovereign mercy, and thankful for any hope of reconciliation to God, upon any terms he may see fit to require. He can have no objection to a Mediator, however far that Mediator may go, in taking part with God, and condemning sin. Upon the discovery of the gospel method of salvation, a true penitent must readily fall in with it; and however he may be transported with joy by the hope of pardon, his hatred of sin will not be lessened, but abundantly increased, by a view of the means by which forgiveness was obtained, and his acceptance with God insured.

SECONDLY: The universality of its obligation. *All men, every where.*

And if this was the command of God in the Apostles' days, is it not equally enforced now? Or has the general profession of Christianity rendered a compliance with this requirement

unnecessary? Certainly, it has not prevented the existence of sin. Formal idolatry has been extirpated from among us; though it had a revival under a new appearance, by the adulteration of Christianity. But that has been, in this country, and many others, reformed: and none of you ever bowed your knees to an idol. But have you set up no idols in your hearts? Have you never given to other objects, that reverence, homage, and supreme regard, which is due to God alone? Have you not failed, both in your duty to him, and your duty to your fellow-men? Do not some enter our assemblies, who are chargeable with the grosser vices, though perhaps they are in a great measure concealed from their fellow-men? Have none been defiled with vile affections? or almost distracted with bitter passions? And if they could have given unrestrained liberty to either class of these evil propensities, would they not have committed far viler things than they have ever ventured to do? If murder itself could have been effected by a wish, is it certain that every one here would have escaped that charge? Can any one read the tenth commandment, and say, I have uniformly kept the whole of God's law? Or, can you, even on the slightest view of these two commands, on which hang all the law and the prophets, acquit yourselves, or establish your own righteousness? Let each examine himself, and say, if, in all his doings, his sins do not appear? What defects have attended the most decent, in all relative duties! How little proof can you bring of universal and disinterested benevolence! How little attention to your own best interests! How little concern for the glory of the ever-blessed God! What have you ever done for him? What have you ever foreborne to do, from regard to him? How much have you lived without God in the world! How little have you attended to the discoveries of his will! How little have you regarded his glorious gospel! How unthankful have you been for his unspeakable gift! And now, have you no need of repentance? no ground for poignant sorrow? no cause for grief and humiliation? Verily, God has declared, that except you repent, you will perish. He commands all men every where to repent.

THIRDLY : The ground and design of the requirement.

Not that your repentance can make satisfaction for your offences. But because it is just and righteous that you should own and lament your guilt, and be deeply ashamed of your revolt from God. And because God has designs of mercy, which cannot be accomplished, without sinners are brought to repentance. Christ, as a Saviour, is precious to none but penitent sinners. Others may feign to embrace him, but cannot cordially fall in with the way of salvation by him. It is impossible to see the need of his mediation and atonement, without realizing the evil of sin ; and our sense of the riches of his grace, and the worth of his salvation, must be in proportion to the conviction of our demerit and guilt. Unless we see sin to be unspeakably criminal, we shall be offended with the import of his atonement ; and unless we long for deliverance from sin itself, as well as its penal consequences, we cannot coincide with the design of the Redeemer, who gave himself for his people, to redeem them from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Therefore—repent, and believe the gospel.

And now let me ask you, Have you ever sincerely and cordially repented ? Have you had much fear of consequences ? Have you any abiding sense of the intrinsic evil of sin ? Is your mind quite changed in this respect, so that you cordially condemn and abhor all that God condemns and abhors ? Are you deeply humbled for past sins, and present sinfulness ? Are you careful to depart from all iniquity ? Are you filled with abiding humiliation and self-abasement ? Do you admire pardoning mercy ? Do you prize sanctifying grace ? Do you labor to undo the ill effects of former sins upon others ? Are all your hopes of salvation founded upon the mediation of Christ ? Are you willing to be to the praise of his grace ? and willing to be the property of the Redeemer ? Are you willing to own other true penitents as your brethren, let them be ever so mean in the eyes of the world, or let them once have been ever so vile ? Ezek. xvi. 56. 61. 63.

LXXXVI.

PAUL'S ADDRESS TO FELIX.

ACTS xxiv. 25.

And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

It is one great excellence of the word of God, that it leads us into the knowledge of ourselves, and lays open the human heart, with all the deceits of its desperate wickedness; while it also shows the nature of true religion, and its wonderful power in the renewed soul. Both of these are exemplified in the text. Here we see the noble spirit of Paul, taught by divine grace to adhere to his Master in the prospect of danger and death; and scorning to use any such means for deliverance, as might be dishonorable to the cause in which he was engaged. We find no flattery, no bribes, no concealment, no handling the word of God deceitfully, no insult to magistracy, no abject meanness in suing for relief. But he is more concerned for the mental bondage of his judge, than for his own liberty, or life. He gladly discourses with him respecting the faith in Christ; but will by no means adulterate the gospel to suit it to the taste of Felix; but endeavors to strike at his conscience, and to wean him from his favorite lusts.

Jews and heathens attest that Felix was a bad man; cruel, covetous, unjust, living in adultery with Drusilla, (daughter of Herod Agrippa, who was eaten of worms,) whom he had seduced from her husband Azizus, King of Emesa, and had procured the murder of Jonathan the High Priest, for inveighing against his tyranny. These things show the pertinence and fortitude of the Apostle's conduct in the text; while the case of Felix, here recorded, illustrates the deceitfulness of sin, as will appear in the sequel of our discourse. We remark,

FIRST, It is the part of a faithful minister, at once to address the understanding and the heart. Paul *reasoned* with

Felix ; yet not in a dry and frigid manner, but so as to make him *tremble*.

True religion is a rational thing ; every branch of it will bear examination. The law of God is perfectly reasonable, and though our reason could not have discovered the gospel method of salvation, or various mysteries connected with it, yet there is nothing in it contrary to right reason.

It is reasonable to believe that there may be such peculiarities in the divine essence as we cannot fully comprehend, since there are such even in the nature of the meanest creatures. And as to the mediation of Christ, it is perfectly rational that the Supreme Governor should so plan the salvation of sinners as to support the honor of his law, and discountenance iniquity.

Yet the most rational truths must not be so treated in a dry, speculative way, as to leave the heart unaffected. We must labor to the uttermost to awaken the conscience, and affect every feeling of the soul. We should not wish to influence the affections, without proportionably enlightening the understanding ; but we should wish and labor to have men affected with the truth ; nor can they well be affected too deeply, if it be the truth alone that affects them, and that in proportion to its importance.

SECONDLY : The most evangelical minister may, on many occasions, find it necessary to insist upon legal and moral subjects.

The law must be preached, as well as the gospel ; yea, before the gospel, though in subserviency to the gospel. And both parts of the law—duty to man, as well as duty to God. Conviction often begins with the former. By the law is the knowledge of sin ; and without that, we can know neither our need of the Saviour, nor our obligations to him. Generally, convictions of sin begin with some particular and outward evil ; and so by tracing back the streams to the fountain, men are made acquainted with the plague of their own hearts : whereas there is a way of talking of the sin of our nature, which leads the sinner to excuse the sin of his life. We must be careful to guard against this. Some indeed, condemn all legal preaching ; they would have all

gospel, and no law. Such people are either very ignorant, or very wrong in a worse respect. True, *illegal* preaching is always wrong: i. e. such a false view of the law as encourages self-righteousness. But there is a faithful preaching of the law, which some may stigmatize as legal, which must not be neglected, as it is the only way to kill self-righteousness. Gal. ii. 19.

There was a peculiar propriety in Paul's dwelling on righteousness, (or continence,) and judgment to come, on account of Felix's well known character. It is the part of a faithful minister to strike at those evils to which his hearers are most addicted; though this should be so done as to avoid needlessly exposing a man to others; but we should labor to expose him to himself; not dwelling before our hearers, on others' sins, from which we think them most exempt. As if we should enlarge on the sins of the rich to the poor, of governors to subjects, and *vice versa*. But endeavoring, by the manifestation of the truth, to commend ourselves to each man's conscience, as in the sight of God. 2 Cor. iv. 2. So did Paul.

THIRDLY: Close addresses to the conscience will sometimes make those tremble, who are not eventually turned to God. So it was with Felix. See! the judge trembles before his prisoner!

Though a man must be virtuous himself, in order to his loving virtue, or having any heartfelt sense of its primary beauty and intrinsic excellence; yet, without this, he may be convinced, both of the inconsistency of his own conduct, and of the power and determination of the supreme Judge to punish him.

Though the power of conscience is often weakened by the prevalence of vicious passions, yet, in many instances, God awakens it to a considerable degree, even where the soul is not renewed, nor the disposition changed.

So, one who has no gratitude, or no love of chastity, may be made to feel his inconsistency in resenting ingratitude in one to whom he had been a benefactor; or, if any one should violate the honor of those who were connected with him. If Azizus had dealt with Felix as Felix did with him, he could have seen the evil of that! A

malefactor also may be terrified on account of the consequences of his crime, when he has no genuine repentance ; but would repeat it, if it could be done with secrecy and impunity.

FOURTHLY : There is a wretched disposition in sinners who are partially awakened, but not truly renewed, to procrastinate the concerns of religion. So Felix.

They are afraid to let ministers or monitors see how closely they are wedded to their lusts. Yea, they dare not believe it of themselves ; and therefore they pretend only to put off their return to God. Whereas, this procrastination indicates an aversion to the thing itself ; though perhaps they hide this more from themselves than from others, and cannot at all hide it from God. Alas ! it leaves Satan time for fresh devices. It gives the impression time to wear off, and affords time for fresh workings of sin. It gives sinners time to deceive themselves ; it renders conversion less likely ; provokes God still more ; and makes conversion, actively considered, more difficult. There is little probability that the more convenient time will come at all.

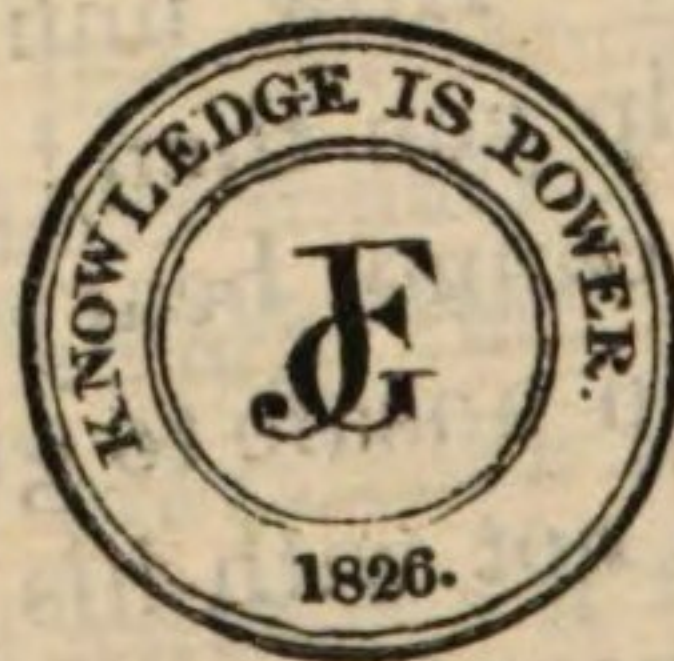
Time ! you have no time for delay. You are not sure you will have any more. God gives you none, for any other purpose but to serve him. Satan will leave you none, by his good will, but to fill up the measure of your sins.

When will this time come ? Are you young now ; and will it be more convenient when thronged with business, and the cares of a family ; when infirm with old age ; or, when on a death bed ? How unfit then yourself ! How difficult for others to help you then ! What danger of being deceived ! Dying folks cannot bear examination ; they want comfort, though it is often unsafe to give it. O take warning by Felix ! I charge you not with his grosser vices ; not with injustice to man, with incontinence ; God knows if you are guilty. But I remind you all of judgment to come, and ask, if you have no room to tremble when you consider the number of your sins ; their manifold aggravations, God's perfect knowledge of them, the power of his anger, the impossibility of escaping, the eternity of woe. I charge you with sad omissions of duty, with slighting Christ, neglecting salvation, with procrastination, with dangerous delays. I

affectionately and earnestly remind you that time gets shorter, your guilt accumulates apace, the power of conscience gets weaker, the power of sin stronger. The soul is more blinded, and bound, and fettered by sin.

Now then is the accepted time! Now, cry mightily to God! Now, attend the means of grace! Now, begin to be constant and fervent in prayer! Leave vain companions; forsake the foolish, and live; and walk in the way of understanding. Now, be willing to know the worst of your case, while we can direct you to a Saviour. Now, repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out. To day, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

It is a good token of sincerity if you want not to get rid of your convictions, but to have them deepened. If you want a whole salvation as soon as possible; want much of the power of godliness, not the form only. Want both peace of conscience, and tenderness of conscience; pardon and purity; a title to heaven, and meetness for it.



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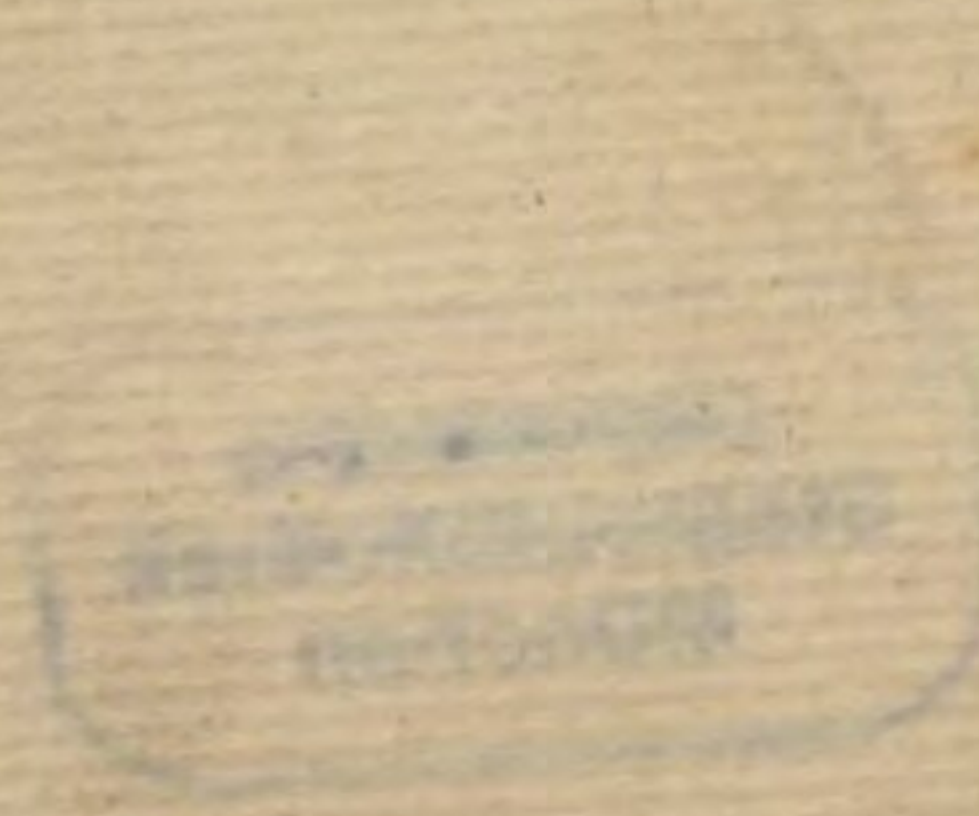
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